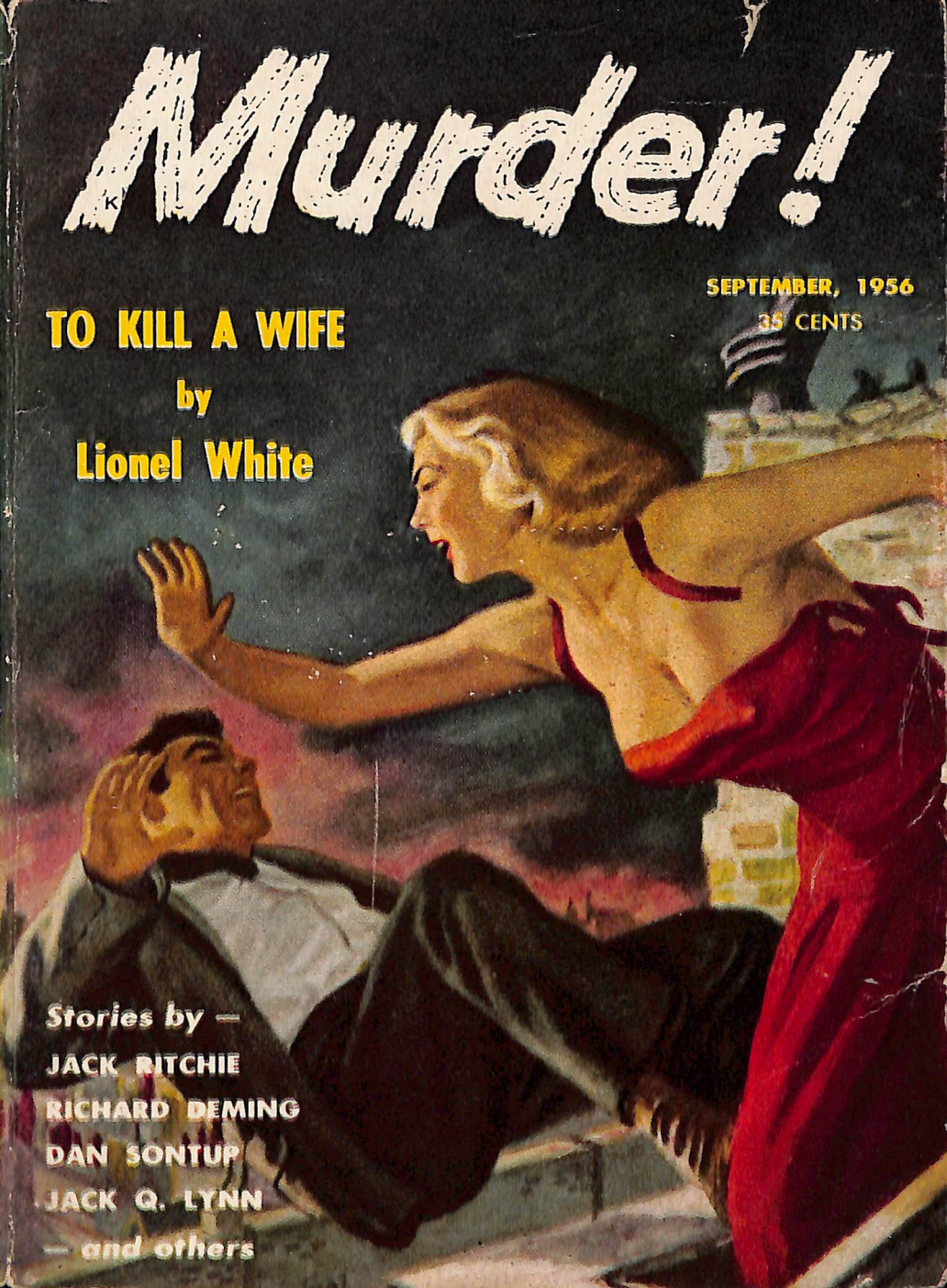
Murder!

SEPTEMBER, 1956
35 CENTS

TO KILL A WIFE
by
Lionel White



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RICHARD DEMING
DAN SONTUP
JACK Q. LYNN
— and others

VOL. 1, NO. 1 **MURDER** SEPTEMBER, 1956

Cover by Frank Cozzarelli

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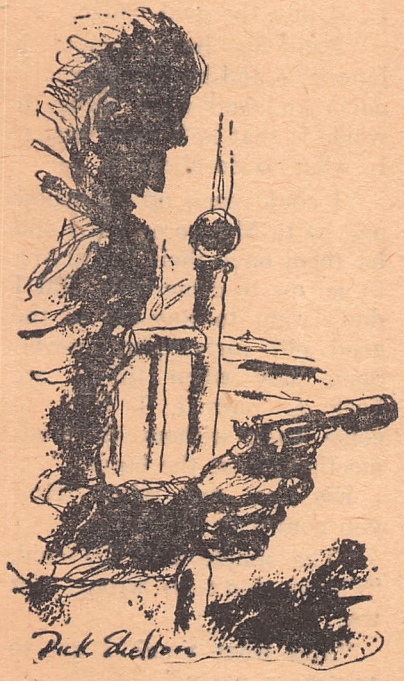
MURDER Volume 1, Number 1, September 1956. Single copies 35 cents. Subscriptions, $4.00 for twelve issues in the United States and Possessions; elsewhere $5.00 (in U.S. funds) for twelve issues. Published quarterly by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc., 545 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N.Y. Telephone MU 7-6623. Application for second class entry pending in New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Holyoke, Massachusetts. The entire contents of this issue are copyrighted 1956 by Flying Eagle Publications, Inc. under the International Copyright Convention. All rights reserved under Inter-American Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use, without express permission, of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Postage must accompany manuscripts if return is desired, but no responsibility will be assumed for unsolicited materials. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions appearing in this magazine and those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in U. S. A.

dead cops are MURDER

I've got to get that plane to St. Paul. If I don't — it's my neck.

BY JACK RITCHIE



"KILLING a cop is never a bright idea," I said. "It makes everybody mad."

"I don't give a damn what you think," Reagan said. "You're getting paid good to do it."

I shrugged my shoulders. "All right. I won't worry about it. I'll be back in St. Paul on the first plane out, but you'll still be here and you're liable to get squeezed rough. They'll have an idea who called for the job."

"They won't squeeze hard if they're smart," Reagan said. "If they decide to pull me in for talk, some of the boys will give me advance warning. I got a doc who'll examine me before. And when my lawyers get me back home, he'll do it again. If I got so much as a busted fingernail, there'll be hell raised."

I sat there with my drink and considered Reagan. He was a big florid man with black hair that straggled wetly over his forehead. He ran

everything in this town that operated best at night. Reagan used to take care of killings himself, but now that he could wear evening clothes without feeling uncomfortable, he let others do them for him.

"How come one man can bother you so?" I asked. "I thought you owned the force."

"I control pieces of it," Reagan said. "You can't buy a whole police force. It's a simple matter of human stubbornness on the part of some people and also basic economics. You just buy the key pieces, the ones that can be bought, and hope for the best."

He got up to refill his glass. "I don't mind an honest cop here and there, as long as he's stupid. But Randell's got quite a brain."

He tonged ice cubes into his glass. "Nobody can control a town all the time. Every ten years or so the citizens put down their comic books and decide to pick up the cleaning broom. They even go out and vote."

He measured his whiskey by ear. "I don't mind taking a vacation for a while. I need the rest anyway. But I want to do my resting in a nice sunny place where I don't have to march to the dining hall in formation.

"An honest cop—a real honest, smart cop—stands out in this town like a monk in a convent." He blew cigar ash off his vest. "I'll tell you what's going to happen, Trapp. These amateur boys will win the election, no matter what we do about it. And as soon as they do, they'll look into the clear blue eyes of Randell and hand him the gold badge.

"Randell's been around a long time and he knows what's going on. And what makes it worse is that he'll know exactly what to do about it.

"I could pack up right now and go to Mexico or Cuba and let them have their fun trying to get me to come back. But I don't want to stay out of the good old forty-eight forever. Some day when things are back to normal, I want to come back without the Feds meeting me at the border."

His eyes met mine. "How you gonna do it?"

"The simple way," I said. "Things don't go wrong that way."

"And what time? I got to arrange a party."

I thought it over. "This

Randell married?"

"No. No complications. He lives alone in a small apartment on the corner of 12th and Franklin."

"Then you pick it," I said.

He scratched his jaw. "Around eight should be right. Everybody'll still be sober enough at my party to remember I was there."

"You can give me the money now," I said.

I WENT back to my hotel room and napped until about seven. Then I checked the .38 and fitted on the silencer. I shoved it into the briefcase, which I put under my arm, and went downstairs for a bite to eat. I finished at twenty to eight and walked slowly toward 12th and Franklin.

It was a three story building with a foyer just big enough to let two people pass each other. I studied the directory and found that Randell had apartment 25.

I walked up the carpeted stairs until I found the door I was looking for and pressed the buzzer.

He was a medium-sized man in shirt sleeves and he held the open evening's newspaper in one hand. His sharp blue eyes flicked over my face.

"Lieutenant Matt Randell?" I asked.

He nodded his head.

"I'd like to talk to you about something important," I said. "Reagan figures in it."

"Can't it keep a couple more years." he said. "I'm full of Reagan right now."

"It might keep," I said. "But you should be interested right now."

His eyes went over me once again and then he stepped back. I walked into the apartment and sat down. It was a single room with adjoining bath and kitchenette. I put the briefcase on my knees.

Randell stood watching me a few more seconds and then he decided to take a chair opposite me. "I never saw you before," he said.

"And never will again," I said, smiling. "That's why right now is so important to both of us."

His eyes went to the briefcase. "If it's information, I'm listening. If it's money, you're wasting your time."

I unzipped the case and put my hand inside. "No, you're guessing bad." I brought out the .38 and pointed it at his

chest.

He sat without the slightest movement. his eyes traveling from the silencer to my face.

"Do you think you could be bought now?" I asked, interested.

He almost smiled. "I'm considering it."

I shifted my weight to make myself more comfortable. "Can you guess why I'm here?"

He did smile thinly then. "If it's to scare me, you won't go away disappointed."

"No," I said. "It's more serious than that."

His eyes shifted slightly and I knew what he was looking for. His short-barreled .32 was hanging in its holster from the door knob of the closet about six feet away.

I could see that he was going to try for it, but he needed a little talking time to think over the best way to do it.

I wouldn't have minded some talking. I'm always interested in how a man meets death, but I couldn't take a chance. The trouble with these silencers is that they have the habit of jamming the gun after one shot.

I might get him as he made his dive, but the chances were that I'd need more than one shot to put him away. I didn't like the idea of me with a gun that didn't work and him pulling up one that did.

Regretfully, I squeezed the trigger.

Randell grunted slightly as the slug bored into his flesh and he flopped out of his chair with the unco-ordination of instant death.

I PUT THE gun back in the briefcase. went to the door knob with a handkerchief and let myself into the hall. I was dabbing at the surface of the buzzer with the handkerchief, when I noticed the brown-haired girl at the door of the apartment next to Randell's.

She had two large bags of groceries in her arms and she was having difficulty using her keys to get into the apartment.

She smiled at me. "I hope you don't mind," she said. "But would you hold one of these while I get the door open?"

"Not at all," I said. I took one of them while she unlocked the door.

"Thank you very much," she said as I returned the bag.

She had a nice smile and so I smiled too. I touched the

brim of my hat. "No trouble at all," I said.

Outside on the sidewalk, I took a look at the palm of my hand under the first streetlight. Not even moist, I thought in a pleased way.

Sure, she could identify me if she ever saw me again. But she never would. Randell's body most likely wouldn't be found until somebody came to find out why he wasn't reporting for work, and by that time I'd be in St. Paul. She could look through all the mug prints at headquarters until she needed glasses. My picture wasn't in anybody's files.

In my hotel room I packed the briefcase away with the five grand in the suitcase. I glanced at my wrist watch and saw that I had about an hour to kill before I could catch a plane.

I picked up the suitcase and checked out of the hotel. About a block down the street I found a hamburger joint. I got a pack of cigarettes out of the machine and sat down on a stool.

"Two burgers with," I said. "And coffee."

The counterman, a wiry little man of sixty or so, splayed out two balls of meat on the hot sheet. He drew my coffee and slid the sugar to me.

"Kind of chilly tonight," he said.

"Yeah," I said. "A little nippy." I looked idly around and saw that the only other customer in the place was a sandy-haired man working on a piece of pie in one of the booths.

The counterman put the burgers on a plate and he was just setting them in front of me when the door opened and the two punks walked in. I picked up one burger as I took a look and a prickling came to the back of my neck. Both of them were high on the brown cigarette stuff and the tiny pupils of their eyes glowed. They were in their late teens, pale-faced boys with the thin-shelled bravado of the perpetual delinquent.

I CHEWED slowly and wondered if they were going to go through with it. They hesitated for a moment as they looked around. and then the taller of the two moved to the juke box and turned his back to it. He brought out a rusty looking revolver and swept the room with it.

"This thing works," he said,

his voice high. "Everybody behave and you'll live to tell your grandchildren about it."

The other kid had a better looking gun. "Move away from that cash register, Pop. I'm coming in to take a look."

I noticed the man in the booth lay down his fork. His head went slowly back and forth as he alternately watched one and then the other.

The short, chunky kid went behind the counter and rang up a No Sale. His face twisted in disgust. "A lousy twenty-two bucks."

"What did you expect," Pop said dryly. "This ain't no bank."

The short kid stuffed the money in his pocket and moved out from behind the counter. "Throw your wallets out on the floor," he ordered.

I took mine out carefully and tossed it down. I watched the sandy-haired man get to his feet. He licked his lips for a few seconds and then seemed to take a deep breath. His hand went to the button of his suitcoat.

He didn't quite get the snub-nosed .38 out of the belt holster. The tall punk's gun spit angrily twice. The man in the booth crumpled and he slid between the table and the bench.

The punk's eyes turned toward me glowing with killer madness.

I dove over the counter as the shots came and landed hard against the shelf of coffee mugs. I lay there hugging the floor, my heart pounding wildly.

After a couple more shots, I heard the sound of a hard slap. "Snap out of it, you damn fool," I heard the chunky kid say. "Let's get the hell out of here."

I heard their footsteps moving fast toward the door, and then I heard the door slam. I lay there unable to get up right away and marveling in a detached way at my trembling and weakness.

Finally, Pop straightened up. He looked over the counter and his mouth got tight. He walked over to the phone.

I came to my senses. It was time to get out. I couldn't get mixed up in anything like this. I got shakily to my feet.

Then I saw the faces pressed against the windows and far away I heard the cat wail of a siren. Pop didn't have to phone, I realized suddenly. Somebody had heard

the shots and done it for him.

I picked up the suitcase and looked at the glass door. My stomach tightened around fear. It was too late to get out.

THERE WERE about twenty people out there and more coming. Their fascinated eyes traveled a thrill circuit from the body of the sandy-haired man, to Pop, and then to me.

I put down the suitcase and wiped the palms of my hands on my trouser legs. I looked at Pop with a weary indignation. "Why did he do it?" I asked hoarsely. "Why did the damn fool go for his gun?"

Pop sat down on one of the stools and reached automatically for the pipe in his shirt pocket. "He had to, mister," Pop said. "He had to because he was a cop."

Pop glanced once more at the body and then looked away. "Joe Farley," he said. "Just a rookie cop. Off duty and all he wanted was quiet and something to eat."

Pop's eyes hardened. "The force ain't all perfume and flowers," he said, "but there's one thing that gets every cop mad. You just don't kill a cop, mister."

His hand brought out a tobacco pouch. "Those two punks are going to fall down a lot of stairs before they ever get to court. A lot of stairs."

Two cops elbowed their way through the outside crowd and into the diner. They looked down at the sandy-haired man silently and then one of them went back out to the squad car.

I picked up my cup of coffee, but I was spilling so much of it that I set it down again. I lit a cigarette instead.

The homicide detectives were there in less than ten minutes and a pair of them took me to one of the booths.

"I'm Sergeant Wilson," one of them said. He was as tall as I am, but thinner and his hair was graying. He cocked a thumb at the other man. "And this is my partner, Sergeant Cooper. Your name, please."

I didn't see how it could hurt to give my right name. I figured they'd want to see my identification papers anyway.

"Trapp," I said. "Charles Trapp."

"Address?"

"2489 North Wendell." As he wrote it down, I added,

"St Paul, Minnesota. I'm just here visiting friends. I have a plane to catch at ten."

"Mister," Sergeant Wilson said, looking up. "A cop's been killed. Your plane can wait."

"Tell us about it," Cooper said. "From the beginning."

I gave them the story and described the two punks.

"You'd recognize them if you saw them again?" Wilson asked.

I hesitated. "Well, I don't know. I was pretty scared."

"You gave a pretty good description," Wilson said. "I think you will." He got up. "You and Pop better come down to headquarters with us. We'd like to have you look at some pictures."

"Look" I said. "Making this plane is important to me."

"I don't hear you, mister," Wilson said.

AT HEADQUARTERS they took Pop and me into a small room and began bringing in folders of mug shots.

"Put the suitcase in the corner if it bothers you," Wilson said.

"It doesn't bother me a bit," I said irritably.

After two hours my cigarettes were gone and Wilson brought me a fresh pack. I was pulling off the red strip, when I glanced down at the next page and there was the tall kid who did the killing.

I lit a cigarette and puffed slowly as I thought it over. Finally, I looked up. "This is one of them," I said.

Wilson got to his feet and came over. He studied the picture and the record. "All right," he said. He picked up the book and took it over to Pop.

Pop blinked his red-rimmed eyes a couple of times before he looked. "It sure is," he said. "It damn well sure is."

I shifted in my chair. "I got a pretty important appointment in St. Paul. Pop ought to be able to spot the other one."

"Keep looking," Wilson said. He left the room with the book and returned about twenty minutes later.

Sergeant Cooper came into the room chewing furiously on a kitchen match. "You mad?" he asked Wilson.

Wilson raised an eyebrow.

"Get a lot madder," Cooper said. "Matt Randell got it too."

"No kidding!" Wilson exclaimed. Cooper walked to the water cooler. "His brother dropped by to borrow Matt's golf clubs. He buzzed, but there was no answer. He tried the door and found Randell on the rug with a slug in his chest." Cooper took a drink of water, crumpled the paper cup and left the room.

I turned a few more pages in the book. I found a photograph that I thought would pass.

"Here's the other one," I said.

Wilson carried the book over to Pop. I glanced at my watch.

Pop shook his head. "Nope."

"Pop can't see," I said.

"Maybe," Wilson said. "We'll put it aside. Sit down, Mister, and look some more."

Cooper came back. "Found a witness," he said. "A girl who lives next door to Randell saw a man coming out of Randell's apartment this evening. She got a pretty good look and they're bringing her here to look at the pictures. She says he has the first joint of the little finger on his right hand missing. She noticed it when he touched the brim of his hat."

I closed my right hand and looked at the mug prints until I found one that looked like the chunky kid. "Here he is," I said.

Pop studied the photograph for a minute and I watched him closely.

He sighed. "Nope. A lot like him, but nope."

"You're crazy, Pop," I said. "That's him. I was right there."

"So was I," Pop said. "And I still got twenty-twenty."

I stared at Sergeant Wilson and then went back to the books. The door opened and I jerked involuntarily.

It was a deep voice that spoke from the doorway. "We got them, Sergeant."

I put my hand on the suitcase and got to my feet. Pop took his time getting up, and he stretched.

"Come on, Pop," I said. "Let's get this over with."

WILSON and Cooper took us into a large room and we saw the two punks sitting on a bench. They were interested only in their pain. The tall thin kid was crying into a handkerchief wet with the

blood from his mashed nose. His face was ragged with cuts made by the ring on somebody's fist. The chunky one was nearly blind from the beating he'd gotten, only a thin slit of iris showing on one eye. He sat with he head low and he crooned in soft misery.

The big beefy bluecoat standing next to them grinned as he reached out for the hair of the chunky kid and jerked his head back so that we could get a better look. "They're a mite messy," he said. "Fell down a couple of times."

I looked down at his big hands and saw the blood crusted on his knuckles. I wiped my forehead with the back of my hand.

"We damn near have to guess—the condition they're in," Pop said. "Not that it makes me cry."

Wilson looked them over and turned to the big cop. "You're getting kind-hearted, Harris," he said. "They still got faces."

Harris' grin broadened. "They was just brought in, Sergeant. I ain't had much time."

"It's them," I said, and the timbre of my voice startled me.

"Take your time," Wilson said. "Be sure."

"Damn it," I said. "I'm sure. I'm positive."

"How about you, Pop?" Wilson asked.

Pop tilted his head and considered. I looked up at the wall clock and followed the red second hand as it moved from four to six.

"Come on, Pop," I snapped. "Don't take all day."

"Take it easy," Pop said. He looked them over carefully. "Yep," he said.

"Hold it, Mister," Wilson said. "A few more things we got to do."

They took me and Pop into another room with desks in it and Wilson handed me a sheaf of papers. "Read this carefully, check for any errors, and sign it. It's your statement."

I paged through rapidly and scrawled my signature.

"You read fast, Mister," Wilson said. He looked at my right hand and frowned as though he were tying to remember something.

I went to the door and Wilson came with me. "You're in an awful hurry," he said. "You might as well spend the night in town. No planes leave after eleven."

"I'll take a train," I snapped.

"We'll keep in touch with you," Wilson said. "You'll have to testify at the trial."

"Sure," I said. "Sure."

Wilson kept pace with me as I hurried down the corridor. We clattered down the stairway and as we turned at the first landing, I saw her.

She was between two plainclothesmen and she raised her eyes. They widened in recognition.

The fear tore at my mind and I knew there was only one thing for me to do now. There was just one way out. I dropped the suitcase on the landing and my fingers tore at the clasps.

"What the hell..." I heard Wilson say in surprise.

"That's him!" the girl screamed.

I had both the side clasps open in a second and was snapping the lock. My fingertips just touched the butt of the gun when Wilson's foot lashed out.

It caught me on the side of the face and I clutched at the air as I began falling.

I rolled down the stairs, unable to stop, and the sharp marble edges of the steps slammed into my face and body.

It hurt. It hurt a lot.

But I knew that this was only the beginning.

● ● ●

Touchy Gunman

Jack L. Meister, 32 and a cab-driver, was handed a dollar bill after delivering his fare to Brooklyn. The meter read seventy-five cents.

Meister gave the well-dressed man the quarter change and the man walked off.

"Hey, don't I get a tip?" the cabbie wanted to know.

Returning to the cab, the man said, "I'll give you a tip!" and shoved a gun through the window. He departed with $65 of the driver's money.

night chill

To fight Rocco, you had to be quite a man. Or a girl like Ellie....

BY CARROLL MAYERS

NOBODY left when Rocco said the meeting was over; it was hot and muggy on the street and the gang wanted to hang around the cool cellar. Rocco waited a minute, said: "All right, you guys. Cut out." Then he added: "Not you, Vic."

I looked at him as the rest of the guys filed out. He sat watching me, chair tipped back against the wall, thumbs hooked in the loops of his belt. I said: "Something up?"

Some hair straggled into Rocco's eyes. He squinted through it, said: "Yeah. Something I figure you can tell me." He brushed back the hair. "What's with that sister of yours?"

My heart picked up a beat. It was hard to keep my voice steady. I said: "What you mean, what's with Ellie?"

He slammed the chair down. "Don't play stupid. You know damn well what I mean."

I looked away. "I don't."

Rocco said: "You lie, but I'll spell it out anyway. Your sister gives me an itch." His dark eyes leered. "I figure she's for me, but she keeps standing me off."

I flushed; I could feel the blood burning my face. I

blurted: "You can't talk that way about Ellie."

He laughed harshly, stood up. "So who's to stop me?" His laugh died as he grabbed me by my shirt. "You've been in the neighborhood two months, in the Knights one. You know the score. You know I call the plays, get what I want."

I tried to break away, couldn't. I said: "But there's plenty of girls—"

"Sure there are," Rocco cut in, "and they're up on the roof with a dozen different guys a week." He twisted my shirt tighter. "Ellie's not like that; she's special. Like I said, she's for me. And not the hard way."

I was sweating. I said: "I can't help it if Ellie don't—"

Rocco slapped me. "She looks at me like I was dirt. I figure you can stop that. I figure you'd better."

I tried to pull my shirt free. Rocco hit me across the mouth, knocked me down. He stood spread-legged, fists cocked. "No girl gives me the chill. Every chick in the neighborhood knows that."

My lip was split. It began to swell and I tasted blood. I tasted fear too, sour and sickening, because Rocco was big and strong and the light in his eyes was mean. My shirt was soaked, my armpit clammy. But I couldn't take what he was suggesting about him and Ellie.

I said: "Go to hell, Rocco."

Rocco's mouth twitched; he made a grab for me. I tried to roll away, but Rocco caught me, yanked me to my feet. Then he swarmed close, black eyes wild, breathing hoarse. He kneed my groin, slammed me against the wall, jabbed hard fists into my stomach.

I tried to cover up, fight back, but Rocco was too fast, too strong. He pounded at my mouth and head. I felt a tooth crack; blood from my cut gums choked me. The cellar walls tipped and swayed because my eyes were blurred.

Then I was down again and Rocco was a shadowy hulk above me and his voice, tight and cold and far away, came filtering through: "Maybe now you'll talk to Ellie. Maybe now she'll get smart."

Rocco's voice faded. Faintly, I caught the scuff of his heels as he left. I lay there, spitting blood and clutching my stomach.

When I got home, Mom and

Ellie hadn't come from work. I washed my face with cold water at the sink. My mouth had stopped bleeding, but my lower lip was puffed and there was a bad cut under my left eye. I soaked a wash cloth to hold to my face, went up to the roof where it was cooler.

I sat on the rear coping, looking down at the dirty back yards, catching what breeze there was and wondering what to tell Mom and Ellie about my face. Making up a story for Mom would be bad enough, but I didn't even want to think about lying to Ellie. We'd always been close, Ellie and me. I was a year older, but mostly it seemed the other way around, with Ellie taking my side in any family argument or neighborhood rumble, protecting my interest, persuading Mom to go easy. She never did it openly, and she'd have denied it if I'd ever thrown it up to her.

I sat there, holding that wet cloth to my face, thinking. After a while I heard Ellie's voice: "Vic."

I swung around; Ellie was standing in the stairwell door. She said: "I wondered if you were up here—" and then she stopped. Her eyes went wide as she saw my face, and she started toward me, then checked herself.

I went to her so she could stay where she was. Ellie was afraid of heights; they made her sick. She never ventured out on the roof whenever she came up looking for me.

I said: "It's all right. I'm not hurt."

Ellie fingered my face gently. "What happened, Vic?"

I made it casual. "Little argument," I said.

Her blue eyes studied me closely. "Fighting's not like you," she said. "You've changed since we moved here and you joined those Knights." She put her hands on my shoulders. "You've got to get out of that gang, Vic."

We'd kicked that around before. I said: "I can't, Ellie. Around here, a guy don't belong, he's nothing."

Ellie sighed, dropped her hands. "Was it Rocco?"

I said quickly: "No. Just one of the guys."

Maybe I'd answered too fast. Her lips thinned out as she said: "It was Rocco, wasn't it?"

My cracked tooth was beginning to ache. I said short-

ly: "So it was Rocco. We had an argument, had it out."

Ellie was watching me closely again. "Was the argument over me?"

I met her gaze. "No," I said. "Rocco wanted to set up a rumble with the Falcons. I said—"

She cut me short. "I despise Rocco," she said tightly. "His eyes undress every girl he sees and his hands—" Ellie stopped, then said: "You know Rocco wants me to be his girl, don't you?"

I looked away. "Don't talk crazy."

She caught my hand. "Rocco beat you up to force me. That's it, isn't it, Vic?"

I said: "No, it isn't."

She wasn't listening to me. "And if I keep standing him off, he'll beat you again."

I said: "Damn it, Ellie, I told you—"

Ellie pressed her fingers over my lips. Her eyes were soft and there was a quiver to her mouth as she patted the wet cloth beneath my eye. "I'm sorry, Vic," she said, and started down the stairs.

I said: "Tell Mom I told you I'd eat down town. Maybe this eye'll look better in the morning."

Ellie turned briefly, and I caught a taut expression about her lips. "I'll tell her," she said.

When it got dark, I went down to the street, walked a couple of blocks to a diner, got a hamburger and Coke. My tooth hurt when I tried to chew and the cold soda made it worse. I finally quit eating, hit the street again.

I wanted to kill the evening by myself. Hunting up any of the gang, I'd've probably run into Rocco sooner or later. I didn't know what to do about Rocco. I'd cursed him, tried to fight him because of what he'd suggested about Ellie. But at heart I knew the truth: Rocco was strong, real strong, with a mean, vicious streak. I couldn't take him, ever. I was afraid of Rocco.

I went to a movie. The picture was lousy, and after about ten minutes I didn't bother watching. I just sat there, trying to relax, letting the air conditioning cool me off.

It was after eleven when I left the theatre; night hadn't brought much relief from the sticky heat. I walked home slowly, sat on the front stoop smoking a final cigarette before going inside.

I was thinking of Mom and what I would tell her when she asked me about my eye, when I heard this scream. It all happened fast. I guess I jumped up the second I heard it. And before I had time to realize that this scream had come from up above me, from the roof, this black something came hurtling down and hit the sidewalk. I just stood there on the stoop, not moving, looking at the sidewalk and thinking: "It's a guy. Some guy jumped off the roof and there he is laying there."

Even when people started coming from every direction, from across the street and down the street, I kept on standing where I was on the stoop. The guy's brains were probably spilled out of his head, bloody and slimy, and I didn't feel like seeing anything like that. Not that I was scared; I just didn't want to.

There was a cop telling people to get back, when I first noticed Ellie had come down from upstairs and was standing on the stoop behind me. I didn't know how long she'd been there, for she just stood, not saying anything.

My first thought was to tell Ellie to go on back inside, because I didn't want her to see what was down there on the sidewalk. But I saw how pale her face was.

No wonder, I thought, with something like that happening. "Hey," I said, "you better get back in the house."

Maybe she shook her head, I don't know, but she didn't say anything. That was when I noticed her dress was torn, up near the shoulder, like it would be if somebody got hold of it and tried to rip it down. And I also saw how she kept staring toward the sidewalk where whoever it was was laying there dead.

Then it hit me like a ton of bricks. "Good God Almighty!" I said. It was a hot night, but I felt cold. "Ellie! Good God Almighty!"

She just kept standing there, staring out toward the street.

"Come on," I said, and I turned her around. "Go on. Get inside." I wanted to say something to get that staring look off her face. So I said. "He deserved it. Don't you worry, Ellie. That S. O. B. Rocco deserved it..."

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round-robin with rifles

It was a question of Nell's being faithful. Only Death could give the answer.

BY RALPH CHERRY

HUNTING bear in the Ontario bush, Mike Keller was in the lead. while his partner, Jay Maleet, brought up the rear.

It was sudden impulse that made Keller turn and see Maleet taking a bead on him.

"No!" Keller screamed, throwing himself to the ground as Maleet fired. The bullet ripped through Keller's jacket, skinning him slightly.

Keller was lying in a tangle of brush. He could clearly see Maleet, while Maleet could see him only indistinctly.

After a moment, Maleet approached hesitantly. "Mike," he called.

Keller had the safety off his rifle, was thinking, *Just a few more steps, buddy...*

Then Keller fired. Maleet screamed, knocked off balance by the force of the slug that had caught him in the chest. For an instant he danced crazily, finally sank to the ground, having died on his feet.

Lighting a smoke, Keller stared at the dead man. They had grown up together, worked together, built a successful business, which was still doing well. It couldn't have been money that prompted Maleet to attempt murder. Both had more money than they needed, and the future looked

brighter than ever for them. *Then why? Why would Maleet want me dead?*

Keller tried to think and there seemed to be only one answer.

"My wife?" Keller asked himself, exhaling a lungful of smoke.

He thought about Nell and wondered if she and Maleet had been lovers. Playing him for the sucker. Was it possible she had planned this thing with Maleet? He thought back over the past week, remembering the times the three of them had been together, trying to remember what *they* had said, how they had acted, and trying desperately to remember if they had been alone at any time. But there was nothing he could put his finger on—

It was a hard and rotten thing to believe, but Nell wouldn't be the first nor the last woman to play her husband for a patsy. For a man to try to murder his best friend, it had to be for that friend's wife.

How was he to prove this?

Nell was back at camp, had stayed there claiming she had a migraine headache. Before he was finished, she'd have more than that.

Putting on Maleet's red jacket over his khaki, he started back. In the dull light of dusk, he'd let her think he was Maleet. If she came running, he'd know for sure his guess was right. Instead of Maleet —she'd meet death.

It was almost dark when he arrived at the camp; still she recognized him.

"Mike, what are you doing wearing Maleet's coat?" she asked.

Mike was at a loss for words.

"Has something happened to him?" she demanded.

Finding his voice, Mike muttered, "There's been an accident. We got to bring Maleet help. I left him my jacket because I figured it was warmer."

"What happened?"

She was cool, unperturbed. He admired her for her ability to mask the emotions she must be feeling, not knowing if her lover were dead or alive.

She was a beautiful blonde and had a shape that matched her beauty. This morning he had loved her; now he hated her with as much intensity.

"What happened?" she demanded again.

"Accidentally shot Maleet. We got to bring him help."

"I'll get the bandages, the medicine."

Watching her gather the supplies, he wasn't so certain now that she had put Maleet up to killing him. What he suspected was unimportant. Knowing, being sure, was all important.

Supplies packed, field clothes on, she said, "I'm ready."

They headed off into the brush.

I got to know. I got to know. Keller kept telling himself over and over.

He didn't take her directly to the body, but took a roundabout way. He had to have time to think, to plan what he was going to do.

"How much further?" she asked breathlessly.

He pointed, "Right ahead there."

Slowly they approached the motionless figure.

"Is he—is he still alive?" she asked, her voice trembling and afraid.

"I'll look."

Stooping, Keller reached for a pulse he knew was no longer there. He did it to stall, to think, to find a way to prove the unfaithfulness of his wife.

"I got to know," he said half aloud.

"Is he.....?" Nell asked.

Keller nodded. How was he to know?

Looking up, he knew. She had her rifle aimed at him. "You bitch," he said. They were his last words, for the bullet plowed into his brains.

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Decree Granted

The rugby player had participated in six games in a week's time, and he was tired. That was why, she told the judge, she had invited the man to share her bed.

The woman's husband, however, had broken into the room to find his wife and her athlete friend and he thought them too scantily dressed to be just resting.

The judge granted the husband a divorce.

money on her body

Just an innocent country girl, Cindy. She wouldn't kill a fly.

BY JACK Q. LYNN

IT'S SUMMER, really hot, and night is beginning to crawl down on us when the Caddy motor cuts out. G swears, then wheels us onto the shoulder of the highway and brakes.

I stare at him. He's little and dark, got Indian blood in him. Got mean eyes, too, with yellow in them.

I tell him I'll take a look. I'm no rod-man; so I'm still under the Caddy hood almost ten minutes later, when this guy tools up beside us in a beat-up coupe. He's a short, fat stud with slitted eyes and a brown-stained mouth. He spits tobacco juice on the highway.

"Trouble, boys?" he asks.

I shoot a look at G. He's got those yellow eyes fastened hard on the fat one. I figure he'll take him fast, then we'll shift the green from the caddy to the coupe and away we go. But it don't work that way.

G says, "No trouble, dad. How far to the next city?"

"Fairview's 'bout ten miles straight ahead. Ain't no city, though." He blinks at G, then

spits on the highway again. "Tell you what I'll do. I live right down the road 'bout half a mile. I'll get my tractor and pull you down there. You can stay with me tonight. Tomorrow, I'll pull you into Harry's in Fairview. Harry is a good mechanic. He can fix anything."

G thinks about it. Then: "Okay, dad. You go on and get the tractor. We'll sit tight."

When the fat one drives away, I look at G. "How come we didn't bust in his head and fly?"

"In that wreck he's wheeling? Maxie, we can do better."

Yeah, I think. Yeah, we can do better cause up to now we've been doing real great. It's six days since we hauled out of the big town. We're tally-hoing to Frisco, or maybe to L.A. That part makes no difference. It's been a ball so far. We've knocked off fourteen places, cleaned up almost eight grand, which is in a cloth sack under the front seat of the Caddy, and we've heisted five rods. The last one is the Caddy. We got it in Chi, and we're rolling through Iowa real good when the motor cuts out.

The fat one come back on top of this tractor that's making lots of noise. He wraps a heavy chain around the front bumper of the Caddy. "Let's go, boys."

We pile into the Caddy.

HIS PLACE is a big white house with a porch across the front. There're plenty of trees around the house and some odd-shaped buildings at the rear. He pulls us into a U-shaped drive and we jump out After he puts his tractor in one of the buildings out back, he spits out a wad of tobacco and wipes his shirt sleeve across his mouth.

"Cindy's w a i t i n' supper. Come on."

We follow him into his house.

I've had lots of cats in my day. Some good, some fair, some lousy. The one waiting for us in the kitchen is a prize. She's young—maybe twenty years younger than the fat one —no beauty, but, man, she's stacked up real good. And she's wearing a cotton rag that doesn't hide a thing. She's big and she's got black hair hanging down on her shoulders and a soft look in her eyes that gets me thinking plenty of warm thoughts.

The fat one says, "My wife, Cindy."

"Maxie, here," I say, breathing deep. "And this is G."

"G?" She stands there squirming, rubbing against the edge of the table, and her eyes don't leave mine.

"Just G," I say, giving the big look right back at her.

The fat one says, "Sit."

We sit. There's food on the table. The fat one and G keep the conversation going. I don't say much and neither does this Cindy, 'cause we're spending a lot of time looking at each other. What I mean is, we're talking, but it's with our eyes, and our jiving isn't for the fat one or G. I'm telling her how she's got me going, and she's telling me I got something for her, too.

The fat one breaks it up after supper. "Let's go outside, boys."

Going through the front room of the house, G catches me short. "You and that chick got big eyes."

"Man," I grin, "how I'd like to..."

"Lay off. You'll screw the works."

"Aw, hell, G, you know..."

"Lay off, man. It looks like we got it nice here. No nabs on the tail. Maybe we'll stick around a couple of days."

Maybe he's talking sense. I don't know. And right now I don't care. I just got one thing in mind.

ON THE porch, I sit in a swing. It's dark and, except for some wind in the trees, it's awful quiet. G is sitting on the top step with the fat one. They yak about going into this Fairview the next morning. And the fat one keeps telling G how this Harry the mechanic really knows his business. I sit there listening without hearing them. I'm thinking about the cat in the kitchen. I got an idea about her now. There's something peculiar in the way she looks at me, something that tells me she's my kind of chick.

After awhile, she comes out on the porch. She's carrying two bottles in each hand. She passes them around without saying anything.

"Beer?" says G.

"Home brew," says the fat one. "Made it myself."

The cat plops down beside me in the swing. Her leg is against mine all the way up. I turn and look at her. She looks right back without saying anything. And she keeps her leg tight against mine. And then I feel her fingers making

tiny figures on my thigh. I get a feeling this is gonna be a large evening.

The fat one wants to know about the big town. G talks. He's a good talker. And the fat one is a good listener—between trips into the house for more home brew. But I don't give a damn what they're talking about, 'cause this Cindy got me feeling like I'm taking a ride on some goofballs. I think if she don't quit the horsing around I'm gonna take her right in front of God and the fat one. Once, while Fatso's after some more bottles I damn near do.

Next morning, we're up early, about eight o'clock. It's gonna be a hot day. The heat's already closing in.

There's food all over the table when we come downstairs, but I'm not interested in food. I've just spent a sleepless night thinking about what was going on in another room in the house, and now I want to see the results.

The fat one looks good. He's got three long scratches across one cheek, but otherwise he looks like he's had thirty hours sleep. Cindy looks good, too. This morning she's wearing a cloth halter and brief shorts and moccasins on her bare feet.

I feel as if I've been cheated. It's me who should've spent the night with her.

After breakfast, the fat one says, "Let's get into Fairview, boys."

G stands up. "Maxie ain't goin'. He don't feel so good this morning. Be okay if he stays here until we get back?"

I'm looking at G. What the hell is going through his mind? There's eight grand in the Caddy. Does he think he's gonna cut out without me?

"You sick, boy?" It's the fat one talking to me. "Maybe too much home brew, huh?"

G gives me a large wink and a wise grin. "That's it," he says. "Maxie's got a big head this morning." He turns to the fat one. "Let's shove."

I WALK OUT of the house with them. The fat one waddles away from us, going for his tractor. I hook onto G's arm.

"What the hell gives?"

"You want that chick, don't-cha?"

"Sure, but...."

"Then get her out of your system. You won't be fit to live with if you don't." He sucked in a deep breath. "And

get her fast. Cause I've had a change of mind. We're haulin' out of here soon as I get back. You and that chick together give me the creeps."

"The green," I say.

He gives me a sharp look. "You think... Yeah, by God you do. Okay. I leave the green with you. Check?"

"Check."

It's as if he's darin' me to try running off with the green. But I know better; anybody'd try something like that on G, they'd end up a dead duck.

I fish the cloth sack out from under the front seat of the Caddy; then I go back into the house. I put the sack on the kitchen table, and I sit down and look at Cindy. She's at a sink, washing dishes. She looks at me over one shoulder, but she keeps quiet. She knows what's in my mind, all right. I stare at her back side. The brief shorts fit real tight over her hips. When I hear the tractor popping out of the drive, I get up and cross the kitchen and stand close behind her.

"Now, chick," I say. I feel warm and tight inside.

She gives me a cold look over one shoulder. "Now what?"

"Don't play cat and mouse with me, chick. I've had 'bout all I can stand from you."

"What does that mean?"

The only sound in the house for a moment is my ragged breathing. Then I hiss, "This!" I hook one arm around her waist and get a handful of her belly skin and twist it cruelly.

She stands perfectly still for about three seconds and then she shudders all over and whirls around and wraps one arm around my shoulder. Her eyes are blazing.

"Will you beat me?" she rasps.

So she was that kind of a chick. "Why not?"

"Beat me," she whispers. "Please. I love it!"

I fasten one hand in her halter and rip it away form her body, and then I stand there pinching her all over. After that, I slap her around some. Then she gives me one sudden fierce hug and breaks away from me and runs out of the kitchen. I grab my cloth sack off the kitchen table and stomp after her. She's already halfway up the stairs to the second floor.

Man, it's a morning like I never had before. She's got me where the hair is short. I

could go on like this forever. But about noon I begin to worry about G and the fat one.

"Something wrong?" she asks.

"Plenty wrong," I say, and tell her what I'm thinking.

A frown clouds her brow. "I don't want them to come back," she says.

I give her a careful look. "What d'yuh mean?"

She sits up on the edge of the bed. "I'll phone Harry's in Fairview, see if they're still there. Then we'll talk about it."

I GET UP on one elbow and watch her walk out of the bedroom. Man, man what a sight! I look down at myself. I'm slippery wet. It's really hot now. I feel like I'm in a fire. I take the top sheet and wipe off some of the sweat.

When Cindy comes back, she's got a grin all over her face. "They won't get back until late afternoon," she says, coming across the room to me. "Good?"

"Real good," I grin, reaching up for her.

She sits on the edge of the bed. But her face is serious. "Maxie, you and G—you're going to California?"

I look at her hand. "How did you know?"

"I heard G tell my husband last night. And I want to go with you."

I sit up and grab my ankles. "What about your stud?"

"To hell with him!"

I think about it. But it's no good. The fat one would have the nabs on us quick. I shake my head.

"Yes!" she says, like she means it.

I look at her for a long while. And then I do a crazy thing. The sack of green is on the floor beside the bed. I pick it up and open it and drive one hand down deep inside.

"Chick, I'm gonna show you why you can't hit out of here with us. I'm gonna show you 'cause you're inside me deep. You got me doing wild things. But so help me God, if you ever open your trap, I'll come back here and cut out your big, fat heart. Remember that."

I haul out a handful of bills then.

"God!" she whispers.

"Beautiful, ain't it? Also hot. Me and G, we're hot too."

She's staring at me. Her mouth works. "You mean you stole all this?" she croaks.

"This and more, chick. Lots more. So we can't have the nabs on our tail—which is exactly what your stud'll put 'em if you haul out of here with us."

SHE LOOKS at me a long time and then suddenly she starts laughing. It starts down deep and kind of works up. The next instant, she's flat on her back on the bed, laughing like a goon. "Sprinkle me," she bubbles. "Maxie, cover me with money!"

I stare at her. I know what she wants, and it's the craziest thing I've heard. But I go kind of blank then. And the next thing I know, I'm standing over her, dumping the bills on her body.

She rolls in them. Some of them stick to her skin. I watch her until my senses come crashing back. I reach out and whip my hand back and forth across her face. She stays quiet, her head flipping with each blow. Then, suddenly, she reaches up and grabs my waist. Her breath is raging in and out of her in deep gasps, her breasts heaving. Her eyes are hot slits.

"You and me, Maxie!"

I shake my head.

"You and me, all the way!"

"G would find us! You don't know G. We'd get the big knife!"

"Not if we give it to him first."

This stops me cold. I stay there, staring down at her. And she hangs on my wrist. I'm crazy mixed up in my mind. This chick's got me doing bughouse things, thinking wild thoughts.

And then she says softly, "We can get rid of both of them. So nobody'll find them. I know how."

Suddenly, I go for her jive. It's gonna be the big score.

We pick up the bills fast and stuff them in the cloth sack. I climb into my clothes. Cindy pulls a dress over her head, finds some shoes. Then we go downstairs to the kitchen to wait for G and the fat one. Cindy gets out a .22 rifle. She puts it on the kitchen table. The muzzle is pointing straight at the door.

We have to wait about an hour before G wheels the Caddy into the U-shaped drive. I look out a window. He's alone. He blasts the horn.

"Get him in here," Cindy says coldly. "My old man won't be here for a while. It takes longer on a tractor."

I go outside the house and wave G inside. Sweat is pop-

ping out all over me now, and there's a pinched feeling in my stomach. I'm shaking a little too.

G sticks his head out of the car window. "Let's get the hell out of here," he yells.

"Come on in a minute," I shout back.

He stares at me, and then he piles out of the car. I walk back into the house and take a position to the right of the door. I've got a thick stick of wood high over my head. G gets into the room before he spots Cindy and the rifle. He stops dead and his mouth pops open, but by that time it's too late. I bring the stick of wood down hard on his head. He crashes into the floor hard.

THE SAME thing happens when the fat one walks into the kitchen twenty minutes later.

G is stirring, moving around a little.

"Hit him," Cindy says.

I swing the stick back, but I can't do it. With a muttered oath, she turns the rifle and slams the butt against G's head.

"Get him down to the barn," she says.

I pick up G, get him over my shoulder, and walk out of the house. I dump him on the barn floor just inside the door. Then I get the fat one. I can't lift him, so I hook my hands in his arm pits and pull him to the barn.

Cindy follows me, dragging a pair of large chains. I help her prop the two limp bodies against a large post. Then she lashes them to the post with the two chains. Next, she picks up a pail and runs out of the barn. I stand in the door watching her. She's at a large tank that sits on top of an angular stand. There's a hose in her hand and she's filling the pail with liquid.

When she comes back to the barn, she says, "Tractor gas."

"What are you gonna do?" I gasp.

"Burn them. You don't want somebody finding their bodies, do you?"

I'm not sure of anything now. I'm numb all over. I turn around in the door and watch her. She pours the gas over G and the fat one, and then she dumps what's left on the floor around them. She faces me.

"Got a match?"

I'm paralyzed.

She comes over to me. I feel her hands go through my pockets, but I don't move. She finds a matchbook. "Get out

of here," she says.

I back out of the barn. A moment later, there's a loud poof, and Cindy comes charging out the door. Smoke billows after her, and then I see the red inside the barn. I hear a terrifying scream. I close my eyes and shudder.

Cindy gets me then. I hear her strangled cry, and I open my eyes. But it's too late. She's bringing the pitchfork up from the ground. The shiny prongs look six feet long. I don't feel anything for a moment, and then the pain shoots through me.

"It's my money," she screams. "All mine now!" And then she's laughing crazy, real crazy.

Blackness blots everything out and when I come to there's other people around us. I don't know where they come from, but it don't matter. I hear Cindy screaming loud.

"This boy raped me! He put his friend and my husband in the barn! He's burning them alive! He wanted me to go away with him! He wanted...."

She screams a lot of other things, but none of it makes sense now cause I'm not hearing real good anymore. I can't see her plain, either. She's there all right, but she's shimmering, moving away from me. And there's more pain. It's all over me. I wanna flop. I wanna get down on the ground. But somehow I can't. It doesn't really matter, though, cause it's getting dark again, real dark...

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Clean Getaway

When the overnight guest of a motel in Danver, Mass. prepared to check out, he figured he would clean his room before departing.

The proprietors of the motel were amazed when they later entered the room to ready it for the next guest, because there was so little left for them to clean.

The meticulous guest had made away with everything, but the beds, mattresses and a 21 inch console television set which, apparently, were too heavy for him to carry.

sweet vengeance

Before the trigger was pulled, there had to be this little talk. No point being impolite.

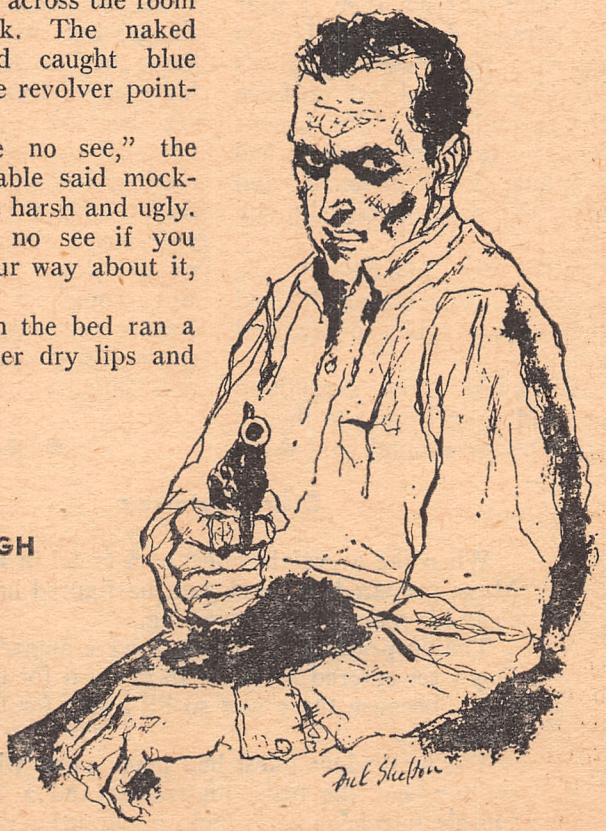
THE MAN seated at the table smiled. It was not a pleasant smile, for there was no humor or warmth in it. Seeing it, the man seated on the untidy bed across the room crouched back. The naked bulb overhead caught blue lights from the revolver pointed at him.

"Long time no see," the man at the table said mockingly, his voice harsh and ugly. "Longer time no see if you could have your way about it, eh, Ed?"

The man on the bed ran a dry tongue over dry lips and

BY

LEE HARBAUGH



tried to smile. "Now take it easy, Frank!"

"Oh, I *am* taking it easy, Ed," the other said softly. "I been taking it easy for fifteen years. Up there in the Big House I've had a real good rest. And plenty of time to think. And to plan." He struck a match with his left hand and lighted a cigarette while the right hand held the gun steady. "You never been in stir, have you, Ed? Nice long nights to think things out. One night I'd figure that I'd choke you to death, nice and slow, then the next night I'd decide to use a knife. It's surprising how many ways you can figure out to kill a guy once you put your mind to it."

The other gripped the dirty bedclothes until his knuckles were white against them. "Look, Frank, I can explain everything if you'll just listen!"

"There's just one thing I want to know." Frank said, leaning forward. "Where is she? Where is Ione? Ione, the beautiful loving wife who helped you hang a murder rap around my neck. Where is she, Ed?"

"I don't know, Frank. Honest to God I don't know. Why should I? I don't know where she went after she left Chicago."

"That's a lie," Frank said. "It took me a long time to tumble to the fact that I had been framed, but once I did, it wasn't too hard to figure out what had happened. There's lots of ways of getting information in stir, maybe more ways than there are on the outside. You see, we're just one big, unhappy family in stir, but we stick together." He laughed mirthlessly.

"You've got the whole thing wrong, Frank," the man on the bed said desperately. "Somebody's been lying to you. Here's what happened. The truth was that I was headed back to the hotel with the money to split with you and Ione and I got slugged and robbed. I've always thought it was one of Lefty Taylor's boys because they'd been sniffing around, but I couldn't prove a thing."

"So you sat back when they identified a body as yours and let me sit in the chair for it! That's real artistic, Ed. You must have shed a lot of tears, you and Ione, when you heard that I'd got a commutation. You must have felt real bad about it!" His eyes blazed. "There's been lots of times

when I've been sorry myself that I didn't burn. I'd rather take that than fifteen years of hell!"

"I didn't know anything about it, Frank. You've got to believe me! You've always had a hot temper and I didn't know what you'd do when you found the money gone, so I just blew. I didn't know a thing about what happened later."

Frank laughed contemptuously. "Fifteen years ago I might possibly have bought that, Ed, but not now. It stinks!"

ED LEANED forward eagerly. "Look, Frank, this is what I figured happened. When I was rolled, the guy took all of my stuff, too, and later on when somebody bumped him, he still had my stuff in his pockets. You see how it could happen that way, don't you?"

"And when you heard about it you rushed right out to tell the nearest cop that it wasn't you that was planted six feet underground so as to take the heat off of me. Sure you did. Save your breath, Ed. You're going to need it. Let me tell *you* what happened. You and Ione had been cooking this thing up for a long time, I can see that now. I shouldn't have been fooled by all that wifely devotion because I knew Ione like a book. Ione is going to look out for Ione and to hell with the rest." At something in the other's face, he chuckled. "You found that out later, didn't you? I'll bet Ione cleaned you out of every cent. Right?"

The other didn't answer, but Frank nodded. "Yeah, I thought so. Well, I'm glad she got it. I'd rather she had it than a snivelling little sneak like you. You know your big mistake, Ed?" His voice was almost kind. "Your big mistake was in thinking you could disappear and yet take a beautiful woman with you—and Ione was a beauty. A man can slip around and keep in the background and not be noticed, but not a woman. At least not a woman like Ione. The only thing she lives for is attention. And once she got her hands on all that money and started loading up with furs and diamond rings, the two of you left a trail so big that a blind man with paralysis could have followed it. I wonder what Ione is like now. How long has it been since

you've seen her?" His voice was almost pleading.

When Ed didn't answer, he sighed. "It's funny how you go on loving a woman, even when you know she's a bitch. After I finish with you, I'm going to hunt until I find Ione. When I find her, I'm going to beat hell out of her and then she's going to be my wife again, whether she likes it or not. After fifteen years, I can be as hard as she is because I don't mind slapping a woman around when she needs it. That's the only kind of love Ione understands."

"I saw Marty Logan awhile back and he said he saw Ione in Palm Beach," Ed said eagerly. "Maybe if you were to go right down there, you'd find her right off."

"Now, don't you worry about my finding Ione," Frank said softly. "I'm pretty good at finding people. I followed you over hundreds of miles and through a dozen different names but I found you. Here!" He looked with contempt at the shabby hotel room. "This is where you belong and it's a good place for you to die. In a rat hole!"

The sweat stood out greasily on Ed's face. "Don't!" he cried. "You said that fifteen years in prison was hell. You don't want to go back for fifteen more, do you? Think what it would be like, going in for another stretch! You can't want revenge that bad!"

The gun in Frank's hand lifted until it pointed at Ed's head. "Remember I told you that I had had plenty of time to think?" Frank said. "There was enough time to read, too, any old thing that would pass the time, even old law books. You know, I found something in them that interested me a great deal. You know what it was? I learned that you can't place a person on trial for his life for the same crime twice. Double jeopardy, it's called. I served fifteen years for killing Ed Morris, and no court in this country can try me a second time. It's all marked paid-in-advance! Any comments, Ed?"

Frank's finger tightened on the trigger...

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marked man

The cops were closing in fast. So Bill had to try everything — including murder

BY DAN SONTUP

AS HE walked up the dim stairway, he finished reading the last of the article and cursed softly to himself. He started up the second flight of stairs and carefully folded the newspaper and tucked it under his arm. He could feel the folded paper pressing against the .45 in the shoulder holster under his jacket.

It was a good feeling. The gun would always be there when he needed it. He let his hand slip down to his jacket pocket, and he reached in and fingered the new switch-blade knife. Six inches of razor sharp important steel. That and the newspaper were the only purchases he had had time to make. It wasn't safe to be out on the streets for too long a time now. The less people noticed him, the better.

He had run a risk buying the knife, but he knew he needed it, knew it with his first quick glance at the headlined article in the newspaper.

He was on the third floor now. He paused to listen. From one of the furnished rooms of the old house, he heard a radio playing softly, but outside of that there wasn't a sound.

At the fourth floor he turned right, walked to the second door, knocked twice, waited a moment and then knocked once more. He heard

the sound of movement in the room, and then there was the rattling of a latch chain and a click as the door was unlocked. The door pulled open to the length of the chain, and he whispered, "It's okay, Charlie. It's me—Bill."

The chain was unlatched and the door opened a bit wider; he stepped quickly inside. Behind him, Charlie shut the door softly and then said, "How'd you make out? How does it look, Bill?"

Bill merely grunted, looked around the small furnished room and through the open door of the adjoining bathroom. "Where's Edna?" he said sharply.

Charlie hesitated, scratched the top of his scalp, his fingers raking the short bristles of his crew cut. "She went out, Bill. I told her not to, but she said she had to get outside for some air before she went crazy in here."

For a moment, the anger welled up inside of Bill, but he fought it down. He never let his anger get the best of him. That was why he had come as far as he had. That was why the police had never been able to get a lead on him on any of the jobs he pulled. They didn't have his prints or his picture on file in any police department in the country—and they weren't going to get them this time, either.

"So she went out," he said carefully. "She went out, and you couldn't even stop her. You'd think a guy could make his own wife stay put."

CHARLIE looked down at the floor and tried to grin, wanting to pass it off lightly. "Oh hell, Bill. You know how it is. After all she has been cooped up here with us for three weeks, and hasn't been out that door once." He tried to grin again and then said lamely, "You know how it is."

Bill nodded. "Yes, I know how it is. But you don't, Charlie. You don't know the first thing about it. You don't know what her going out now might do to us."

Charlie looked puzzled. "How's that? She'll be careful."

"It makes no difference now, Charlie."

"Why?"

Bill tossed the newspaper on the table. "It's all in there."

Charlie started for the paper, but stopped at the two quick knocks on the door. He looked at Bill, drew his gun, and then, at the third knock,

he moved swiftly to the door.

He opened the door to the length of the chain, peered out, then put the gun back in its holster and unlocked the door.

Edna walked in swiftly, her purse and a small paper bag clutched in one hand and a newspaper in the other. Her eyes were wide with fear and she stood in the center of the room and looked at both of them. "They've got us," she said. "They know we're in town."

Bill said nothing, and Charlie stared at her for a moment and then grabbed the newspaper out of her hand.

"Don't bother reading it, Charlie," Bill said. "I'll tell you all about it."

Charlie stopped with the paper half unfolded. "What's wrong?" he said, his voice shaking just a bit. "What's the matter with the two of you?"

Bill walked over and pulled the shade down so it covered the window completely, then switched on the table lamp.

"Remember the wallet you lost, Charlie?"

Charlie nodded.

"You didn't know where it had gone to, did you?"

"No," Charlie said. "I could have dropped it anywhere."

"Well, you dropped it exactly two hundred and fifty miles from here in a little town called Landford. To be exact, the police found it in a corner of Haller's Jewelry Store."

Charlie's eyes had opened into a startled stare. "I dropped it there?" he said in a whisper.

"That's right," Bill said. "Right there—not far from the body of old Haller himself."

"But you killed the old man, Bill," Charlie said defensively. "I didn't. You were the one who gunned him down."

BILL NODDED, amiably, too amiably. "That's right, too. If you recall, Haller started yelling and running for the door and could have given us away." He paused, stared at Charlie levelly. "But I could have saved myself the trouble, Charlie. You did a better job than old Haller ever could have done."

"Quit kidding, Bill. All I did was drop my wallet in the excitement. No real harm done."

"No?" Bill said. "Well, let me tell you what was in your wallet, Charlie. There was a few measly bucks, an identity card with your name on it—and a very clear picture of

your wife. Edna's picture's in the newspaper now, as well as a description of all three of us."

"But how did that happen?" Charlie said, pleading and yet outraged. "So they found the wallet, but that was four weeks ago. And we've been on the move every minute, doubling back, hiding out." He stopped and appeared to think for a moment. "We never saw nothing about the wallet or the picture until now. How come?"

"I'll tell you," Bill said, still too amiable. "The police didn't find the wallet after the robbery. It must have been kicked into a corner in all the fuss. Anyhow, it wasn't found until yesterday when the clerks started moving some of the stock around. After that, the cops started rolling. They blew up the picture, circulated it along with a description of us. Well, they've traced us right to this town—to this stinking little two-by-four factory burg. It's all there in the paper. Edna's picture plastered all over the front page just as plain as it can be."

Charlie stared at Edna and then at Bill. "They know we're in town?"

Bill nodded. "You're surprised? With the easy trail they had to follow, why wouldn't they know we're here? And about two men and a woman—a woman with long black hair, one of the men of average height and looks, and the other one with a crew cut. Just like yours, Charlie."

Charlie's hand flew to the top of his head.

"That's right," Bill said. "The barber here in town identified you, told the cops you had a crew cut there day before yesterday."

Charlie let his hand drop back to his side.

"It's almost funny," Bill said, "the way you made it so easy for them. You let your hair grow for a month—and then you had to go and get that lousy crew cut again, because you don't like your hair long. Why not get it cut? You're sure everything's real safe now. Well, that short hair, buddy, is going to put you right in the electric chair. You'll still be making it easy for them; they won't even have to shave much of it off before they put the cap on your head."

Charlie swallowed hard. "It's not that bad, is it, Bill?"

"It sure is, buddy. The barber told the cops how you rattled on about always keeping

your hair real short, how you said it 'did things' for your looks. When he described you for the cops, that's all they needed. Didn't I tell you that crew cut made you too easy to identify, but no, you wouldn't listen to me, you had to—"

Charlie shrugged. "So what? I can let my hair grow again can't I?"

"There isn't time, Charlie. You've got no time left at all."

"Huh?"

"The cops are closing in. They've got all roads blocked out of town, and they're stopping every man with a crew cut and every woman with long black hair. They're making a house-to-house search in this end of town. How long you think it'll take before they get here? Before our landlady thinks about the three of us in this room—even though we told her I was Edna's brother travelling with the two of you?"

CHARLIE swallowed again, but didn't say anything. There was nothing he could say.

Bill looked at him and then at Edna, and she wet her lips and said, "I saw the paper, too, Charlie, and I think I can help us get out."

"Yeah?" Bill said eagerly. "How?"

She opened the paper bag and took out a pair of scissors and a small box and held them up for Bill to see. "It's hair dye Bill. A new kind. Fast-acting, the druggist said. It'll dye my hair red in a matter of minutes, and if I cut it short first, then they'll be looking for a girl with long black hair and I'll have short red hair."

Bill was silent for a moment. "Yeah. But what about Charlie? He can't grow his hair back in a few minutes. What are we going to do about him?"

"You can go down and buy him a hat, Bill."

"You think that'll fool the cops? You think they aren't going to look under a stranger's hat when he tried to leave town? You think they're dumb hicks here?"

"It's a chance, Bill," she said. "But we've got to take it. With fifty thousand dollars worth of jewels in that bag in the closet, don't you think it's worth the risk?"

"All right," Bill said. "All right. Go fix your hair. I want to think this over."

Edna hurried into the bathroom. Charlie sank down in a

chair and rubbed the top of his head. "I'm sorry, Bill," he said. "If I just h a d n ' t dropped that damn wallet!"

Bill grunted and walked over to the radio and switched it on. A dance band was playing some rock-and-roll music, and he left it at that station while he paced up and down the floor and thought about the newspaper and the knife in his pocket.

He stopped pacing when the musical program ended and the local station identified itself and the afternoon news broadcast came on. The announcer had said no more than three sentences, before Bill knew what he had to do. It was all on that news broadcast—how the druggist had recognized Edna from her picture in the paper, how he had told the police about the purchase of the scissors and the red hair dye, and how everyone was now looking for a man with a crew haircut and a woman with red hair, probably cut short.

BILL LISTENED to the announcer drone on and the anger started inside of him again, but he controlled it once more and walked over and slowly switched off the radio. Charlie half rose from his chair when Edna came out of the bathroom, her hair a short, flaming red, the open bottle of dye still held in her hand.

"L o o k!" she said. "A changed woman. They'll never recognize me now." And she spun around for them to see.

"That does it," Bill said, looking from one of them to the other as Charlie got all the way to his feet. "You're a marked woman, Edna, and you're a marked man, Charlie. You're hooked. You can't do a thing about it now."

Edna looked bewildered; she hadn't heard the news broadcast.

"And what about y o u, Bill?" Charlie said softly.

Bill reached quickly inside his jacket and drew the gun out from its holster. "Me?" he said. "I'm in the clear."

Charlie stared at the gun, his lips moving while he swallowed noisily.

"I'm in the clear," Bill repeated, saying each word slowly. "You notice how they don't have a real description of me? That's because I'm an average-looking guy, and I make sure I stay that way. I don't cut my hair short, and I don't travel around with a woman with short red hair. I'll be just

another guy to the cops and I can hide out in this town, small as it is, until the heat's off and they take down the road blocks and stop watching the bus and railroad stations."

"But what about us?" Charlie said, and his voice was almost a whisper.

Bill smiled. "You two have just run out of luck."

"It doesn't have to be that way, Bill," Edna said.

He looked at her and shook his head. "It does. There's no other way."

"We can still make it," she said. "We can split up. You get out of town one way, Charlie will go another, and I'll make it on my own. You can still buy Charlie that hat, and I'll wear a 'kerchief over my head. We'll make it."

"And the jewelry," Bill said softly. "What about that?"

"You can take half, Bill, we'll take the other half. If you make it, you've got even more than the one-third share you were going to get before, and if Charlie and I don't make it, then you've lost nothing."

"Nothing but twenty-five thousand dollars, Edna. Nothing but half the loot that the cops will have and not you or Charlie or me."

She licked her lips. "Then you take it all, Bill. You get out of town. And if Charlie and I make it, we can meet you later on for our split. How does that sound, Bill?"

Bill shook his head again, and he held the gun steady in his hand. "It won't work, Edna. Once they pick up Charlie—and they're going to, you can bet on that—he'll crack and talk, and then they'll be on my trail before I even have a chance to get clear of the next town."

Edna was silent now, and Charlie just stared at the gun. "Besides," Bill said. "I'm greedy." He smiled. "I like the sound of fifty thousand when I say it. It's a nice round sum. Don't you think so?"

"So that's the way it is," Charlie said in a flat voice. "You're gonna clear out with the loot and leave us to the cops."

Bill nodded.

"I'll sing, Bill. I'll sing real loud. You won't even be able to get out of town."

Bill smiled and motioned with the gun. "Turn around, both of you."

THEY HESITATED and then turned their backs to him.

"You still can't do it, Bill," Charlie said. "One shot, and you'll have everyone on this floor outside the door. Better think it over and try it our way."

Bill smiled and slipped the knife out of his pocket and pressed the catch. The blade sprang open with a loud click. Without giving Charlie a chance to realize what the sound meant, Bill moved quickly to him and thrust swiftly and accurately with the knife.

Charlie dropped without a sound getting past his lips and Bill turned to Edna. She had swung around when Charlie fell. She stared at the knife blade as Bill came toward her. Her mouth opened and she said, "Bill—" but that was all. He lunged with the knife, but she stepped back quickly, the blade ripping at her dress. He drew back his hand, for another try and she threw up her hands protectively in front of her chest, letting go of the bottle of dye as she did so. The bottle came directly at him, hitting him a glancing blow on the top of the head. He blinked, but didn't stop. Edna gave a little gasp as the knife went in just below the protection of her arms. She sank slowly to the floor.

Bill got busy immediately, wiping his prints off the knife, wiping the door knob, wiping everything that he could possibly have touched. Then he got the bag from the closet. It didn't take much jewelry—good jewelry—to total fifty thousand dollars. He stuffed it easily into the pockets of his jacket.

As a last thought, he took the knife, wiped the blade clean on Edna's dress and stuck it in his pocket. Now, even the man who sold him the knife wouldn't be able to tell the cops anything that would matter.

He held his handkerchief in his hand and was just reaching for the door knob, when he realized that something was wrong, that he had overlooked something. The top of his head felt wet.

He put a hand up and touched his hair and looked at his hand and cursed out loud at the red stain there. It wasn't blood. It was exactly the same color as the dye on Edna's hair. He thought of the bottle hitting him in the head and ran into the bathroom and peered at himself in the mirror.

He cursed again as he saw the big red splotch all over one side of his hair. He stood and stared at his reflection for a moment and fought down the panic starting to grow in his stomach. Then he stripped quickly to the waist, grabbed a bar of soap and turned on the tap.

He lathered his hair furiously, digging into his scalp with his fingers, rubbing with all his strength. Then he stuck his head under the tap and rinsed his hair thoroughly. He straightened up, water dripping down his face and chest and stared into the mirror hopefully.

It was still there, as flaming red as ever.

THE PANIC almost got the best of him this time, but he fought it down and slowly dried himself and dressed while he let his thoughts race. A man with average-colored dark brown hair isn't very noticeable, but a man with dark brown hair with a scarlet blotch on one side stands out in any crowd.

Then he thought about Edna's talk about a hat for Charlie, and he knew he had it made. Charlie didn't have a hat and neither did he, but there was a men's clothing shop just down the street. In five minutes he could have a hat.

He left the room, made it down the stairs without any trouble and started down the street. Even before he had gone a few steps, though, he could sense it. He'd seen it happen before, a sort of feverish excitement in the air, a small town come to life because of a crime. The tenseness in the air now hit him like something alive. It showed in the way the people walked on the street, the way they looked at each other, the way they stared at strangers—at him, particularly. Or did he just imagine they were staring at him.

From an open window, he heard a radio broadcast about the police search in that end of town and he knew that all of the people around him realized they were in the middle of a manhunt for three criminals on the run.

He steeled himself to walk slowly, not to attract attention, but he noted a couple of long stares directed at the red mark on his hair. A couple of small boys standing on a stoop looked at him and then whispered to each other. He bit his

lip. Even the kids were playing detective, as the search went on.

He made it to the store without anyone stopping him, but the moment he got in the door he knew he'd made a mistake. The one clerk inside looked up from his paper. Bill could see the same excitement in his eyes—the eagerness of a man who has been reading about a crime and a hunt by the police and who knows he's in the same area as the hunters and the hunted.

Bill walked over to the counter and the clerk said, "Yes, sir, what can I do for you?"

"I want a hat," Bill said, and glanced down at the paper. It was an extra, a hastily put out edition of the local paper with all the details about the druggist's story of the scissors and the red hair dye. The whole thing was there in headlines that could be read in a couple of seconds.

The clerk stared at him, looked at his hair, and Bill could see the eagerness growing stronger in his eyes.

"Yes, sir," the clerk said. "I'll be with you in a moment."

He walked swiftly along the other side of the counter and opened a door at the back of the store and closed it behind him with a hasty slam.

THE STORE was empty now. Bill stared at the closed door and then moved quickly behind the counter and over to the door. He tried the knob. It was locked as he knew it would be.

Bill put his ear to the door, and over the noise of his own heartbeat in his eardrums he thought he could hear the sound of a phone being dialed in the back room.

He pulled back from the door, walked out of the store and went back down the street, still trying to walk normally. Now the cops would be looking for a man with a red mark in his hair.

He let his thoughts move quickly now. The spot wouldn't wash out, but there was still one chance left. He'd have to take that one chance.

He got back to the house, climbed the four flights again and unlocked the door and went inside. He closed the door behind him and looked at Charlie and Edna on the floor. He stepped past them and went back into the bathroom.

He looked at himself in the mirror, then glanced down at the sink and found what he was looking for—the scissors that Edna had bought from the druggist.

He picked them up, looked at his reflection in the mirror again and raised the scissors to the red mark in his hair.

He cut carefully, at first, but the dye had gone all the way down. He snipped faster and faster, panicky, cutting off huge chunks of hair, letting it fall all over him and drift down to the floor.

When he was finished, the red mark was almost gone. Just a slight trace of it was left, that showed only when he turned his head to the light in a certain way.

He put down the scissors and stared at himself in the mirror, and the realization that had been growing in him all along hit him with full force, now that he was finished.

He was now a man with a crew haircut.

He turned and walked across the small room and out the door and started down the four flights of stairs, fighting for control of the fear that had started and wouldn't stop. Maybe—maybe, he thought—there was still a chance he'd make it. But inside he knew differently.

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Addition And Subtraction

It was quite obvious someone had tampered with the pay envelopes belonging to employees of Columbia Combining Corp. of Brooklyn.

On opening their envelopes some of the employees found part of their pay, or all of it plus a small bonus. But all were not so fortunate, for several workers found their envelopes empty or wadded with paper.

Missing from the $6,500 payroll was $3,500 plus the paymaster, Arthur Freedman of the Bronx.

honey of a come-on

No one looked more like a sucker. Marge set him up with care, for the pay-off....

BY JOHN R. STARR

THE GIRLIE show barker started his spiel down the midway and the crowd scurried away from the ring toss game.

One young man didn't go off with the others. He leaned against a two-by-four supporting the tent and lit a cigarette. He was more interested in the girl who was operating the ring toss game than in the free entertainment at the girlie show.

Marge Jefferson sighed at the backs of her departing customers and began picking rings out of the jumble of merchandise on the table. Every time the barker cut loose and sucked away her crowd, she felt a twinge of resentment at the girlie show. Gay Parisiennes. There was comfort in knowing that the plain, unpretentious ring toss game cleared more money than the bright, noisy Gay Parisiennes. Marge and her husband Brad ran the game without extra help, which meant a low overhead. Occasionally, they hired a roustabout to fill in, but not often, for they were saving to buy a concession in Regal American Shows, the big carney that made the big towns. There was no future with Bronson's Royal Shows, Brad always said. Bronson's never made a big town in its life. The big towns were where the money was. And Brad and

Marge would do anything to get into the big time.

Marge noticed the young man leaning against the two-by-four. She saw that he wasn't looking toward the girlie show, where a couple of half-naked girls slouched behind the barker; he was watching her. She let a smile play with the corners of her mouth and moved down the counter toward him. His eyes got wide as she approached.

Marge was accustomed to admiring glances. She had joined the carnival as a dancer in Gay Parisiennes. She was one of the stars when she married Brad and he made her quit. She had missed it a lot at first. It wasn't so bad now. It was a lot harder and a lot more satisfying to get those glances when you had all your clothes on.

"Why don't you go on down and get in on the free entertainment?" she asked the youth.

He blushed. He must be even younger than he looks, she thought. She couldn't remember seeing a male blush since junior high. Somehow it pleased her that she had embarrassed him.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Cat got your tongue?"

THE YOUNG man licked hot, dry lips. "No, it's not that. I just don't care to go, that's all. I've seen a lot of shows like that. I just don't care to go, that's all."

"Oh!"

"Uh, am I bothering you standing here? If I am, I'll move. I thought I'd just stick around until somebody comes back to throw the rings. I like to watch people throw the rings."

"Don't you like to throw them yourself?"

"No, no, I don't care for that. I can't throw them very well at all. I used to try, but I gave it up. I never won anything at all."

"How about a free time? Suppose I let you throw them free? Would you like that?"

"Oh, no! I wouldn't like that any better. It isn't the money. I've got money." He let her see, briefly, a roll of bills. "If I wanted to throw, I could pay for it."

"I didn't say you couldn't. I'd just rather you threw them free."

"But it's all right if I pay you the dime, though?" He dug a coin out of his pocket and tossed it onto the counter. It rolled in a diminishing arc

and finally rattled still. He took the rings.

"Try for something small," Marge advised "It's almost impossible to get anything big."

"Sure." He cocked a ring and looped it at a clock. It settled around the clock but remained propped up on the base.

"Almost," Marge said. "It's got to lie flat"

"I know." He threw another. This one caught on the upraised arm of a miniature statue of Mercury. He threw the third ring. It bounced off a silver cream pitcher and rolled off the table

"See what I said, I just can't pitch them. I can't hit anything at all."

A burst of applause from the crowd before Gay Parisiennes attracted their attention. One of the girls was doing a hula dance on the platform. Every muscle in her body was writhing.

"Charley's giving 'em a real come-on tonight," Marge said. "Must have been at it five minutes already."

"I hadn't noticed."

The young man set his elbows on the counter and looked pensively at Marge.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

He blushed again.

"You'd think it was funny," he said.

"How do you know unless you tell me?"

"All right, then! I was thinking how pretty you are."

"That's not funny. A girl never thinks a compliment is funny."

DOWN THE midway the Gay Parisiennes barker had concluded his spiel and the girls had gone back inside. The crowd was beginning to loosen up. Some had rushed to buy tickets.

"Looks like it's breaking up," he said.

"It is. They're trying to get up nerve to go in now. Sometimes it takes a while with your friends looking on. I'll bet every one of them, even the women, want to go in, but they're afraid of what people will think."

"I know how that is." he said.

Some of the people were beginning to wander down the midway toward the ring toss game. Marge and the youth watched them come. Barkers for the lesser attractions resumed their harangues. A few

meandered past the ring toss game without stopping.

"I've got to crank up or nobody'll throw," Marge said.

"I know."

"Well, it's been nice talking to you."

"Yeah. I liked talking to you, too."

Marge's husband came out of the back of the tent. He looked the young man over. Marge turned her head so the young man couldn't see and winked at Brad.

"I'll spell you for a while, Marge," Brad said. "Go on back and get some coffee."

"Thanks, Brad." She went around the table. "See you, fellow," she said to the youth and pushed through the canvas flap.

Brad went to the front, picked up some rings and prepared to launch his patter. He cocked his head at the youth.

"Nice gal, Marge," he said.

"Yeah."

"Real pretty."

"Yeah."

"Prettier'n any of those bags down to Gay Parisiennes."

"Sure. I was just thinking that."

BRAD TURNED his head away from the youth and scowled. How dumb did these hicks grow? This boy was real thick. He wasn't helping the come-on a bit. Well, the direct approach, then.

He turned back to the youth. "You like her?"

"What business . . . ?"

"Easy, pal. Don't get sore. Would you like to date with Marge?"

The youth grinned foolishly. "Shucks, she wouldn't be caught dead with the likes of me."

Brad leaned over the counter and motioned furtively to the young man. He put his mouth close to his ear.

"I don't mean that kind of date, pal. You know the kind of date I mean."

The youth drew back. The suggestion astonished and pained him.

"No," he said weakly, "I don't know what you mean."

"I mean a date for a quick roll in the hay, pal." Brad hissed. "Real quick. Ten bucks and she's yours."

"You don't mean it! I don't believe it! She doesn't look like that kind of girl. You're lying!"

"Looks'd fool you, chum. A stick of dynamite don't look like it'd blow your head off, but it will. Try it sometime."

"I wouldn't want to. I mean, she's not that kind—"

"Well, forget about it, then," Brad said. He lifted a handful of rings toward the midway and made as if to start a spiel.

"You said 10 dollars," the youth interrupted.

"Cheap at the price. Excuse me, pal. If I don't start spieling, I won't get a ring thrown tonight."

"This'll just take a second. You said if I go back..."

"That's right. There's a rear entrance. But I wouldn't waste too much time. if I was you. She'll only be on relief five minutes or so. Of course, if you go back, I'll understand and...well, you know..."

"Yeah."

Brad winked at the youth, then took a deep breath. "Step right up, ladies and gentlemen," he cried. "Just a dime, two nickles, the tenth part of a dollar and you get three chances at these wonderful prizes." He waved the rings at a passing couple. "Who'll be the first to try? How about you, big fellow? Pick up one of these fine watches for the girl friend. Step right up. Who'll be the first to try?"

The youth moved back as a small knot of people gathered to listen to Brad. He walked slowly away, scuffing his toes in the sawdust, fingering the roll of bills in his pocket. He had thirty-four dollars; he had counted it several times before setting out for the carnival. He could spend ten and still have twenty-four left. But it wasn't the thought of spending the money that bothered him. It was the thought that she was a professional. She wasn't like the girls at Maw Green's house, though. They were sleazy. She was class. Immediately, desire replaced disappointment.

He took the roll of bills from his pocket, peeled off a ten and put that in his shirt pocket. He returned the roll to his trouser pocket. He ducked into the shadow between the tents.

For several seconds he stood in the darkness beside the rear entrance. He could hear her moving around inside. Fear welled up in him. He ducked his head and started away. He kicked an empty bucket and it clattered against a stack of gasoline cans.

"Who's there?" she called.

He stopped and raised his head.

"Is someone out there?" she called again.

He turned and went into the tent.

SHE WAS sitting on a folding chair at a card table. There was a steaming mug of coffee on the table. She held a true romance magazine in her hand.

"Oh, it's you."

"Yeah."

"Have a cup of coffee?" She waved at the chair across the table.

"No thanks, I..."

"You been talking to Brad?" She didn't seem at all embarrassed.

"Yeah."

"If you'd rather not," she said.

"No, no, I'd rather. That is..."

"Don't be afraid of me."

"I'm not afraid."

She got up. She had changed to a robe. She must have figured I was a sure thing, he thought, when he saw she was wearing nothing underneath.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Not here. We've got to go down to my trailer."

"Oh."

She stopped before him and held out her hand.

"Give me the money."

He fumbled the bill from his shirt pocket and poked it at her. She plucked it from his fingers, took it to a chest and put it in the top drawer.

"Come on," she said, and led him out of the tent.

Outside, she took his hand to guide him through the maze of ropes and gear. Her hand was cool and soft. His was damp, clammy.

Several times before they reached the trailer, she stopped and looked around. After each pause they proceeded more slowly.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"I want to make sure nobody sees us."

"Oh."

At the trailer, she fumbled in the pockets of the robe.

"Oh, damn! I forgot the key."

He tried the door handle. The door swung open.

"It isn't locked."

She looked desperately around. He took her elbow to help her up the steps. She jerked away from him.

"There's been a mistake," she said.

"No, there hasn't, Marge." The tall, stout man who said this stepped out of the shadow of the adjoining trailer. Three

other men followed him. Two of them were holding Brad. Brad struggled futilely.

"What's this mean?" the youth demanded.

"Yes, Mr. Bronson," Marge asked the carnival owner. "What does this mean? Can't I entertain a friend?"

"You're perfectly welcome to entertain a friend, Marge," Bronson said. "We're here to see that you do entertain him."

BRAD LUNGED and almost broke away from his captors. One of them hit him on the head with a tent stake. He quieted down.

"I don't know what's going on," the youth said.

"Now that Brad didn't sap you behind the tents like they'd planned, little Margie doesn't want to play," Bronson explained. He whirled on Brad. "How long did you think you'd get away with this, Jefferson?"

"Let us go, Mr. Bronson," Brad whined. "We'll clear out tonight."

"You'll clear out tonight anyway, Jefferson, but first this boy's going to get what he paid for."

"I don't think I like this," the youth said.

"Go on inside, son, you'll like it a whole lot."

Marge tried to run, but the third man moved quickly to intercept her. He dragged her back to the trailer door. Brad made another lunge and got another lick from the stake. He slumped to the ground.

"Go on in, Marge, and get it over with," ordered Bronson.

"For God's sake, have a heart, Bronson."

"Hah!" snorted the carnival owner. "I don't know how long you've been pulling this stuff on my carney, Marge. It wouldn't give me any satisfaction to turn you over to the cops. The loot you've probably made off this deal, the fine wouldn't hurt you at all. But going on the assumption Brad's been successful sapping the suckers and you've managed to back out every time, it'd give me a lot of satisfaction to see this boy get what he paid for." His voice rose and he lifted his heavy fist. "Now get in there fast before I give him his money back and collect myself."

Marge's shoulder slumped. She went into the trailer.

"Go on, boy, it's waiting for you."

"Look, I'd..."

"Look, boy, you've been

played for a prize sap. You'd be behind the tents now, nursing a lump on your head and out at least the price you paid and more, if you've got any more, if we hadn't found out about this. Don't feel sorry for her. You ain't gonna hurt her any more than this lug of a husband who thought up this deal."

The youth's face tightened in anger. "Her husband?"

"If you're any kind of man, you'll go in there and get what you paid for," Bronson sneered.

The youth threw back his shoulders. He scowled at the sniveling Brad.

"Bastard," he said to Brad. Then to Bronson, "Stick around and see what kind of man I am." He ducked into the trailer.

"Throw some water on Jefferson." Bronson ordered. "I want him good and awake for this."

They poured water on Brad. He sat up and listened. The only sound was the shriek of a bed spring.

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Regular Pay-off

Quite understandably, Mayor Roy Clough of Galveston and the Galveston Ministers Association cannot see eye to eye on one subject—the purpose of raiding the pay-for-play houses.

The president of the association had previously complimented Mayor Clough on raiding the houses, for he felt that they should be closed.

But when Clough, who was elected on a platform of making Galveston an open city, announced that he expected to raid the houses every month to help balance the municipal budget, the Association was horrified, threatened to go to the District Attorney.

Clough was amazed when told of the Association's protest. The madames hadn't minded the raid, he said, and he estimated that the city could net $1,000 a month from his new policy of a fund-raising raid once a month.

to kill a wife

He loved Judy, hated what he was planning to do her. But he has no choice . . . .

BY LIONEL WHITE

THIS BOY was sitting on a tall stool at the bar, facing the cash register.

He had a fleshy, muscled face; there was a reddish tinge to his hair and it curled a little. He looked Irish. But his looks were deceiving, for he was a Dutchman.

He was around five foot ten, stocky, and wore a white shirt under a badly cut suit. Somebody, somewhere along the line, had probably told him that a white shirt was a sign of culture. Perhaps twenty-two or twenty-three, his face was unlined, his skin healthy, his nose upturned over incongruously narrow lips. He seemed a nice enough kid. Only people like myself might take him for what he really was.

I edged around the corner of the table and brushed against a slender, peroxide girl who looked as though she were drinking to yesterday, moved a bar stool close to where the boy was sitting, beckoned to the bartender. I knew the barkeep's name and had talked to him frequently, but I didn't call him by name; just held up one finger and he nodded and a minute later I had a bourbon and soda in front of me.

I casually turned on my stool, and looking at this boy, I said to the bartender, "Maybe he wants one, too."

The kid looked up and stared at me coldly, without expression. He didn't say a word and turned back to facing the cash register.

Well, Joey, who has known me a long time, figured that I must have some approximate idea of what I was doing so when he brought my drink, he also brought over a bottle of Bud and put it in front of the kid. Bud was what he had been drinking.

The kid didn't make a move until Joey walked away. Then he stared at the bottle for a minute, picked it up and poured the amber liquid into his glass. I pointedly looked into the mirror over the bar, ignoring him.

He drained the glass, sat it back on the mahogany, and out of the corner of his mouth muttered, "Thanks."

It was a beginning, anyway.

The kid sat there with the beer for about a half hour. I went back to my table after awhile and the thin blonde was still drinking to yesterday, only she was drinking a little faster to yesterday than was probably good for her.

I ORDERED a drink at the table and kept watching the kid and I noticed he was catching me in the mirror over the bar now and then. So when the place cleared out a little, I walked back to the bar.

This time I didn't fool around at all. I walked right up to him, and I said, "My name is Dacey. D A C E Y, Dacey. I've got a last name and when you're ready to tell me yours, I'll probably tell you mine. I keep a room upstairs in the hotel and I've been around here a long time. Joey knows me; a lot people around here know me. You're a stranger, I can see that. I'd like you to come over to my table and have a drink with me."

He gave me that peculiarly cold stare again and then, suddenly, he s m i l e d. But the smile didn't mean anything because I noticed that everything smiled except his eyes.

We went back to the booth and Joey didn't have to be told. He just brought the drinks over and the kid sat there saying nothing. I waited a few minutes and then we had a second drink. Again he gave me that peculiar expressionless stare and then, once more using the side of his mouth, said, "So what?"

I gave him my smile and said, "So I gather you're hang-

ing around here for some reason or other. Are you looking for something in particular?"

"What are you looking for?" he asked.

"I'm looking for a kid," I said, "who probably thinks like you think. I want someone to do a little job for me."

He laughed, but there was nothing funny about his laugh. "Look fella," he said, "I don't know what your racket is. I don't know you and I don't particularly care to know you. So if you've something to say to me, I think you'd better say it and get it off your chest."

I didn't answer the kid for a minute. Instead, I took out my wallet. I leafed through it until I found a century note and I took it out and laid it on the table.

"That's yours," I said, "for being nice enough to listen to me for a few minutes. Now just a second."

I REACHED back into the wallet and took out four more single hundred dollar bills, and then I went on, "Now if you want to behave yourself for the next few minutes, these are all yours. If you don't like what I have to say, when I get finished you can pick up those five bills and get your god damned little self out of here!"

He sat there, bland, expressionless and with an odd attitude of tense expectancy and let me talk.

I told him the story. It took almost a half hour to tell it.

When I was through, he gave me the strangest look, and instead of picking up the money and leaving, he folded it very neatly and handed it back to me.

"You see," he said, "I'm paying you now to listen to me."

I took the money he handed back and pocketed it. "Go ahead and talk," I said.

It didn't take him any half hour. He said what he had to say in about two minutes flat.

"I've got no record," he started out. "I've never done anything that you can go to jail for, and I'm never going to—I mean, I'm never going to jail. You're hanging around this crumb joint, where you seem to be known. You're probably some sort of petty racketeer. So you got five hundred dollars. Well, you still got five hundred dollars. If you've got anything to say that really makes sense, not

just that you know ways in which young fellas like me can make a fast buck or so, but if you got something that really makes sense, why I'm down at the Mills Hotel. The Bleeker Street Mills Hotel. I'm going to be down there for two or three days. They don't have no telephone service there, you know, but you can drop me a card. My name is Smith. Pat Smith. When I get to know you a little better, I may give you another name. But Pat Smith will reach me. Goodbye."

He stood up, turned and walked out of the place.

I smiled. I knew I had my kid then!

YOU SEE, what I'd asked him to do was to commit a murder. I wanted my wife murdered.

I had told him the first five hundred was actually just for listening to me. That there was another forty-five hundred dollars. That there would be no really serious risk and that I had all the arrangements made. I told him that the only thing missing was the person to commit the actual crime itself. That I thought he looked like a likely candidate.

Well, he sure was a likely candidate. And, in a sense, he more or less ended up committing murder. But not for any lousy five thousand dollars. No, he was much too smart for that. He really made it pay off. But I had better start from the beginning.

When I started out I was a bell hop in a hotel. Later on, because I saved my money and stole a dollar here and there, I was able to buy a couple of juke boxes. I parlayed those juke boxes into a half interest in a rather disreputable dance hall and then I bought a hotel. The hotel was really something else, but we called it a hotel and it had a cafe and a lot of girls around the place all the time. It made money.

There was a bookie at the hotel, who payed me a few dollars now and then, and I had several taxi cabs and a few other little things going. All thoroughly legitimate, but all not quite respectable. You can't make too much money if you stay too respectable—or at least I couldn't.

So I was doing pretty good around the time I became thirty years old. I'd learned to talk right and I dressed pretty well. I got along with a fairly decent type of people. I couldn't go certain places, but

then I really didn't want to go to a lot of places. I just wanted to be around the places I had an interest in.

It never occurred to me that I might get married, but I did. I met one of the girls who worked in one of my dance hall joints and I went all the way. I've made a lot of money out of girls, but I'd never played around with them myself. Not until I met Judy.

The day we got married she told me she wasn't in love with me, that she doubted very much if she ever would be, but that I wasn't a bad guy and a hell of a lot easier to take than a lot of other things she'd had to take.

AS IT TURNED out, Judy was a very good wife. She did everything a wife is supposed to do. We didn't have any children, but that wasn't Judy's fault, particularly. That was just the way things turned out. We lived in a nice little house out in Hastings and I came home nights. I didn't fool around with anything, except my businesses, of course. And I'd say Judy was fairly contented.

I provided what I thought I should, including a Caddie convertible, the usual mink coat, and trips to Miami. But I didn't give Judy the one thing you can't buy for your wife, and that's give her a husband in whom she was in love.

So after four years, I knew I was missing something in Judy I'd tried very desperately to find. And this was about the time things began going bad with my rackets.

And, of course, that's when Judy ran into this guy. He was a pretty nice guy. He had a job as a salesman and he used to stop by the house. He couldn't get any other kind of job, I guess, and so he was selling some gadget or other.

He'd stop and talk with Judy and of course she'd buy anything from anybody who'd talk with her. But he came back too many times just to be selling that gadget of his.

It never occurred to me what was really going on until Judy, who is pretty honest, told me she wanted a divorce so she could marry this guy with whom she'd fallen in love.

Well, I was still pretty crazy about Judy and I knew that for me there was only one possible solution. I couldn't give her up and I couldn't stand living with her while she was in love with this guy, so I de-

cided that Judy would have to go.

As I've said I'd always had a tough time making a dollar, so once I'd made that decision about Judy, I figured the only way to become completely cold about it and not have too many regrets, would be to take out a combination hundred thousand dollar insurance policy on each of our lives.

AND THAT is how, after making preliminary arrangements, I happened to be looking for the kind of kid that this Pat Smith seemed to be.

That was the story, right off the cuff, which I told Pat Smith in the bar, after offering him the five hundred dollars just to listen to it.

So, he had given me the five hundred back and walked out, after letting me know how to get in touch with him. That was how I knew I had him.

If he'd have taken the five C's and blown, I would never have seen him again. If he'd got sore or hot-headed, or asked a lot of questions, I wouldn't have wanted him for the job. But he'd merely told me off and walked out after making a second contact possible. So I figured he didn't want five hundred or even five thousand. He wanted twenty or twenty-five thousand.

I couldn't blame him. He'd go to the chair if anything went wrong. And the biggest chance of anything going wrong, of course, would be during the time he was actually committing the murder.

So he knew what the job was really worth and I knew that was why he was playing hard-to-get. It was after he left the table that I decided I'd let him make his twenty-five thousand or whatever it was he wanted, but at the same time I also decided I would have to kill him too. Killing him would accomplish two things: it would save me the twenty-five grand, but more important, it would eliminate the one person who would know I was implicated in Judy's death.

I gave him three days to cool off and worry a little bit and regret the fact that he hadn't snapped up my five hundred bucks. I then mailed him a short letter that suggested he call me as soon as convenient. I included the telephone number of the hotel bar where he had first met me and where I usually hung out in the afternoons.

His call came the very next day. I arranged to pick him up downtown at six that evening.

After meeting him on Bleeker Street, I drove west to the Elevated Highway which was as jammed as usual. We drove on north, past the Hendrick Hudson Bridge and on up into Westchester. I turned the radio on and let him stew. After we had passed through Riverdale, I muted the radio. Traffic had thinned out and I started talking.

I didn't let him get a word in edgewise. I told him I realized he must be interested and that he probably wanted more money than the suggested five thousand and that I guessed it was a job which called for a slightly heavier expenditure. I said the only thing was, if he wanted more money, I would have to change my plans about the way I wanted the job done. I said that instead of one of those mysterious deals, where a stranger kills another stranger and nobody knows why or anything else, that I thought it would be a good idea to bring him home with me for a while. I could justify his hanging around on the grounds that he was doing some very private "research" for me on one of my new ventures. I could also explain that he was a friend of a friend of mine, a kid who didn't exactly have a place of his own and therefore ought to move in and make use of our spare room.

It was easy to see as I talked that he wasn't quite following me. He was too busy trying to figure the angle.

I went on to explain that I had evolved a new and rather subtle plan for the way the whole thing was to operate.

I knew he would go for the idea, because I knew he was anxious to be close to me for a while in order to find out how much dough I really did have and exactly what my motives in this thing really were.

Even at this stage of the game, I could see him beginning to figure out the angles in his own mind. Well, that's what I wanted. Because if he was shooting an angle at me, his defenses would be down a little, and they had to be down if I was to pull this caper the way I *really* planned it.

We drove back to the city, after stopping at a roadhouse and having dinner and a couple of drinks.

THE NEXT night I brought him home with me.

"This is Pat Smith," I said

to Judy. "He's a friend of Harry's."

Of course she didn't know who Harry was, and, as a matter of fact, I didn't either.

Judy said, "Hello."

He said, "How do you do, Madam."

That "Madam" almost got her for a second, but she saved herself a blush and walked over to the sideboard. "What'll it be?" she asked.

He said beer. I didn't have to tell her what I wanted because she'd been mixing drinks for me every evening for almost four years.

He dropped his bag, put his hat on the floor, and sat on the couch. We lifted our drinks.

"Pat here," I told Judy, "is going to help me out with some work I gotta do here at the house. Sort of bookkeeping stuff. He won't be any trouble or get in the way. We'll give him the guest room and he can get his grub outside. I'll be working with him in the evenings, for the next week or so. He'll have his own key and you won't even know he's around. Pat don't do much but read comics and go to the movies, anyway."

So all the arrangements were made and we had another drink and then went in and had dinner. Later we went upstairs and I showed Pat his room. He took the room in his stride, although it was a very comfortable room with its own fireplace and bath.

Late that evening, after Judy had gone to bed with a confession magazine, I went to talk with Pat. I found him sitting on the edge of the bed, stripped to the waist, staring at the floor.

I told Pat that he was to completely ignore Judy, to be polite to her if he saw her around the place, but to stay away from her as much as possible.

If he should run across Heming—Robert Heming, the fellow with whom Judy was having her love affair—he should ignore him completely. I told him, "Be polite to him if you have to say anything. But don't let on you know anything is going on. After all, the guy's a salesman, and he'll probably want to do all the talking anyway. Let him think you think everything is okay and above board. I don't want the guy getting suspicious."

Pat nodded.

And I thought that now I could begin working on the second stage of my plan.

I HAD NEVER been one for mixing much with the neighbors or passing the time of day with the village tradesmen, but now I made it a point to see people around the local stores. I would stop at the corner stationary store in the evenings, for my newspapers, and I made it a point to talk to the clerk who worked there. Later, I found out he was the owner and probably had more money than I had.

I first started by just discussing the weather. And then gradually I began talking more and more about myself. I told him I was in business in New York and spent a lot of time in the city. And then I casually brought out the fact that I had this young fellow staying at our house. I explained that he was a boy I'd picked up hitchhiking along the Post Road. Said I didn't know too much about him, but that I understood he had some sort of criminal record and that I was trying to help get him straightened out and thought he would turn out to be a pretty good citizen after a while.

Then, later, I'd bring Pat into the store with me. Of course, I'd already asked the man not to let on he knew anything about the boy. I'd buy a handful of cigars and Pat would order a pack of cigarettes.

Pat was always polite enough, but I noticed the storekeeper looked at him with a rather peculiar expression. I knew I had planted the seed which was going to be very important to me if my plan were to work out.

At the same time, I followed a similar procedure at the gas station which serviced my car and at two or three other spots in the neighborhood. I wanted Pat to be seen with me and I wanted everyone around to know as much about him as I could let them know, so that later on when things developed and they were questioned they would back up certain ideas I had planted in their minds.

At the same time, I began working on Judy. I made a point of asking her to meet me in town for lunch.

One day we went to a midtown restaurant where I obtained a quiet, secluded table. Judy looked very lovely in the dimly lighted room with her dark blue eyes like smudges and her red, red mouth. She wore a large picture hat which partly concealed her face. I knew I was still in love with

her and that I probably always would be. It made me feel sad.

We had lunch and then we talked.

"Judy," I said, "I've been thinking a lot about your being in love with this guy Heming and his being in love with you. I've thought the whole thing over. One thing I don't want, baby, is for you to be unhappy."

I WENT on along this line for some time. Then I told her it was all right for her to go ahead and get her divorce. I did have a couple of requests to make, however. I wanted her to wait a couple of weeks so I'd have a chance to get some business straightened out and loosen up some cash. I wanted time to get some extra money so I could get her a good lawyer and give her a stake to go out to Reno on, where she could plan to get her decree.

'One thing I want you to do, baby," I said. "For the next two or three weeks, until I get things straightened out, I want you not to see much of this Heming guy. We don't want no scandal and we can do this thing right, like friends, which I hope we still are."

Judy told me she thought I was being very fair about everything. At one point, she got very sentimental and almost cried. It was a funny thing, I damn near felt like crying myself. Because, I still loved her. But with Judy it was strictly sentimentality. She just didn't want to hurt me.

She had a sidecar—that made her third—and got a little weepy. I had a double brandy and thought it was a damned shame I was going to have to do what I was going to do. Judy promised she wouldn't see Heming again until after she got her divorce. And then she went shopping and I went down to the hotel to see Joey and get a bet down on the third race at Washington Park.

I've always made it a practice not to carry large sums of money with me; I do most of my business by check. But now I began violating a lifelong rule. I began making it a practice to stop by my bank every day or so to draw out large amounts of cash, anywhere from a thousand to five or six thousand dollars in fairly large bills.

After the third or fourth time, my banker took me into his private office and warned

me that it was a bad idea having large transactions when there were no check records kept. He also said it was unsafe to carry large sums.

I told him a long story about being involved in a new venture and that I was conducting most of the business from my home. I said I was buying services from various men who met me at the house and whom I paid off in cash. He nodded, but I knew he didn't have the faintest idea of what I was saying. I didn't even know myself. But the point was, I had it firmly implanted in his mind that I was carrying large sums, and that I had substantial amounts of money around my house.

PAT HAD been with us about ten days when I figured the time had come to make the next move. He was getting a little jittery, just sitting around doing nothing all day, but reading comic books.

One night I told Judy that Pat would be going into town with me the following day. She nodded, hardly listening.

"When do I go to Reno, Dacey?" she asked.

"Soon, baby," I told her. "Maybe next week. I'll let you know in a couple of days. I'm just getting the money together now."

She kissed my cheek in a careless gesture of affection. In a way, it was worse than if she hated me and had struck me.

The next morning Pat got into the car beside me. We drove into New York without speaking. Pat had the car radio turned on full blast. He liked cowboy music. I explained when I let Pat off that I was going to the hotel. I gave him the room number and told him to give me a few minutes and then come on up. He arrived some ten minutes after I'd opened the windows to air the place out. I don't use the room much and it gets stuffy.

Joey sent up a bottle of bourbon and after I had a drink all mixed and was ready to sit down and talk, Pat reminded me he drank beer.

I sent down a second time, this time for beer. The beer was warm and that gave me a certain amount of satisfaction. By now I was getting just a little tired of Pat.

The windows closed again, and seated at last, I told Pat my plans. These were the arrangements, as I explained them to him.

When we went back to the

house that night, we'd let a couple of days slide by. That would bring it up to Wednesday. Wednesday was the day the servants, a man and his wife, had off. Wednesday morning Pat was to pack his bag and get ready to leave.

I went on to explain to Pat that I had already arranged for Judy to meet me in town Wednesday night to take in a Broadway opening. She would be home alone during the afternoon and would be ready to leave the house for town about seven fifteen in order to meet me at eight thirty.

I would leave the house for town around noon.

At ten minutes to seven, while Judy was sitting at her dressing table getting her face made up, Pat was to go to her room. Knowing Judy as I did, it was a fifty-to-one bet that she would follow her usual routine. She always waited until the last minute. And it took her a good hour to get ready to go anywhere.

From my inside breast pocket, I took a snub nosed thirty-two caliber revolver with a short silencer on its barrel.

"This is the gun," I said. "You walk into her bedroom, the door is always unlocked. She may hear you and she may not. It doesn't make much difference. The minute you open that door, shoot her. Let her have three or four slugs. I don't want any mistakes."

AS I TALKED, Pat sat there staring at me without expression.

"My watch will be timed with yours," I said. "Five minutes before you shoot Judy, I'm going to be talking on the phone with Robert Heming. I'm going to tell him Judy has been in a serious accident and is calling for him, that he is to come at once to the house. He lives about two miles away, down in Yonkers."

"How do you know he'll be in?"

"Listen, kid," I said. "It's my business to know things like that. You just let me plan this job and be sure to handle your end of it."

Pat nodded.

"Heming should reach the house at no later than seven o'clock. By this time Judy should certainly be taken care of. When the doorbell rings, answer it at once. He won't know who you are. but that doesn't matter. He'll be all up in the air at the time. The thing is, you're to take him to Judy's bedroom immediately.

Explain it any way you want. Let him get in the room before you enter. The thing he'll do first is rush over to Judy and lean down to see what has happened. That's when you let him have it. From as short a distance as possible, and in the left side over the heart."

Pat nodded, still noncommittal.

I took twenty-five hundred dollars from a long fat wallet I carried in my jacket pocket. I counted out the bills and handed them to him.

He looked up without touching them.

"Take 'em," I said. "A down payment. I'll explain the rest in a minute."

I next told Pat he was to carefully wipe the murder weapon and then place it in or as near as possible to Heming's hand. In any case, he was to get the man's print on the grip. I again told Pat to try and hit Heming in the left side, over the heart if possible. I explained how necessary it was to have it look like murder and suicide. Necessary for both our sakes.

I handed Pat a note. It was a pretty good forgery of Judy's handwriting. It was a suicide note, signed with her name. The idea was that Heming and Judy had had a suicide pact. Pat was to leave the note on Judy's dressing table.

That done he was to take his bag and leave the house from his own entrance.

IT WOULD be dark and he was to walk directly north on the street on which we live. Three blocks from the house, I would pick him up. I'd drive him into New York and drop him at the airport. I would then return to the house and find the bodies. I would be the one to call the police.

"How do I know the cops will figure a suicide pact?" Pat asked.

"It will be the only conclusion possible," I explained to him. "My lawyer will testify that I had arranged to let Judy get a divorce. Today I told the mouthpiece that I'd changed my mind and had told Judy so. My lawyer knows that the two of them were in love; Judy herself told him so. The fact that I refused to give her a divorce will establish a motive for the suicide pact. If they don't go for that, the evidence will have to lead to a conclusion of murder and suicide. In any case, you'll be out of it. And should you ever be

questioned, I'll have your alibi all set. The same as I'll have my own."

Pat nodded. "You've got twenty-five hundred now," I went on. "When I meet you to take you to the airport after we're all through, I'm giving you another fifteen thousand. That's all I can raise in cash. Later on, after I collect the hundred thousand on Judy from the insurance people, I'm giving you an additional ten thousand."

Pat looked up quickly and I knew I'd made a good plan. I wanted him to squawk about the money end of it. It would divert any suspicions he might have of my real plan.

"You said I'd get twenty-five thousand cash." he said.

"Right. But damn it, this way you get even more. So what if you do have to wait a while?"

"Look here," Pat said. "That's not the idea at all. Get up the twenty-five."

"All right," I said. "Suppose we do it this way. Fifteen more when you finish the job and then another fifteen when I get the insurance. That's thirty-two fifty in all. Thirty-two thousand five hundred dollars."

Well, we batted it around for a half hour and finally he gave in and we shook hands on it. He was surly about it though.

We returned to the house separately that night. On Tuesday, after breakfast, I had a long talk with Judy. I told her I had made the final arrangements with the attorneys and that within four days she would be able to leave for Reno. I also asked that she say nothing to Robert Heming until the day before she left and at that time I would turn over a sufficient amount of money to her to see her through.

"One thing, though, baby," I added. "Tomorow is Wednesday. I have tickets for a new show, and in view of our four years together, I'd like to take you to a nice dinner and the theater. Make a sort of farewell party out of it. It will be our last evening together. Tomorrow I'm checking into a suite at the hotel. After you've gone, I'm going to sell this house. I'll split whatever I get for it, with you."

Judy looked a little unhappy, the way a child looks unhappy at any unexpected request. But she also looked sort of relieved. She readily agreed with my plans.

WEDNESDAY turned out to be a bleak, wintery day. The skies were leaden and the bare trees appeared naked and cold in the chill wind.

I drove into town late in the morning and went at once to the hotel. Joey mixed me a couple of sours as I looked over the scratch sheet. Nothing looked very good, but I laid a fifty on a long shot in the sixth anyway. I followed my usual routine.

Pat, of course, was at the house. I'd got him a new batch of comic books, and he already had the fake suicide note, the gun with the silencer and the advance dough. His bag was packed.

I had told Pat that once we hit the airport, I'd give him the other fifteen thousand. I let him believe I didn't quite trust him to go ahead with the murder once he had that much cash on him. I was still working on the basic psychological principle that the more Pat thought I distrusted him, the less he was likely to distrust me.

I hung around the hotel bar long enough to get the results on the sixth race and, contrary to my expectations, my horse came in and paid off sixteen-fifty. It made me a profit of three-hundred and sixty-two dollars and fifty cents.

There was snow in the air as I left the city. I was timing myself carefully. Everything from this point on out depended on people being at certain exact places at certain exact times. As I drove up the Parkway, a thin ice was forming on the roads. I passed two accidents.

My nerves, however, were in excellent shape. I was glad about the weather. Few persons would be out on a night like this.

At twenty minutes to seven I was parked in front of a vacant lot, some hundred and fifty yards down the street from my home. I noticed a Ford sedan across the street, a block away, and it looked vaguely familiar. But I paid no attention to it. My eyes were on my own place and nowhere else.

At this exact moment, as I glanced at my wrist watch in the dim light of the shaded dashboard, I knew Judy would be sitting in front of her dressing table in our bedroom. She would be leaning forward slightly, tracing her lips with carmine. I could visualize the scene. She would be in her bra and panties and nothing else.

I'd watched her a thousand times as she made up. It was always the same.

And then, as I realized that now, this very second, the door would be opening and Pat would be there with the silenced revolver, I think I had a moment of regret. In a sense, it was a shame to destroy anything as beautiful as Judy. She would be looking up now, half turning in her chair. And then she would be dead.

I checked my wrist watch with the dashboard clock. The hands of both pointed to six forty-five.

Perhaps I shuddered, I don't really know. But the sense of regret was deeper than ever, and I am a man who has never regretted easily.

There were five minutes to kill, so I turned on the radio. It's odd how I remember it now, but there was a violinist playing Caprice Venoir, and I hunched back in the heavy leather upholstry of the seat and felt a sense of infinite sadness as the soft, deep, sentimental strains of the music came to me. I have always been a sucker for classical music and particularly for violin solos.

It lasted a little more than five minutes, but I waited it out anyway. Then I snapped off the radio and stepped from the car, slamming the door behind me.

Strangely enough I felt the urgent need for hurrying, but I controlled myself and was almost casual as I walked toward my home. Dimly I was conscious of the fact that there were no lights visible from the street. The windows in Pat's room, however, were lighted and the shades were down.

Pat's work was over, that I knew full well. And Pat was waiting for the bell to ring. A cold, ruthless murderer, with one body still not cold, waiting for Robert Heming, his second victim.

I REACHED inside my coat for the shoulder holster under my left armpit.

The gun I took out was a .22 caliber on a .32 frame. That morning I had loaded it with soft nosed dum-dums. I carried a permit for the gun so I knew there would be no trouble later on. There were three bullets in the revolver and I would use them all.

It was dark on the porch, but I had no trouble finding the bell. Again it struck me as odd that there were no lights in the front of the house. But

I had no time for thinking now. I heard the steps as they approached. That would be Pat. My left hand rested lightly on the door knob. I felt the knob begin to turn.

I waited no longer. Quickly leaning my weight against the door, I shoved it inward. There was some slight resistance and I believe there was a sort of muttered sound of surprise.

I could just barely make out his outline, but I am sure that I got him with the first slug. The other two followed rapidly and went into him as he sank to the floor.

Even as the body struck with a dull thud, I dropped my gun into my side coat pocket.

Time now was of the essence. Those shots were bound to have been heard in the neighborhood. I had to get into that bedroom and get the suicide note from the dresser where Pat had left it. I didn't bother with the lights, for I knew my way through the house blindfolded.

I hurriedly crossed the room and ran down the long hall. I could see the crack of light coming from the door as I approached. A second later and I had pushed into the bedroom. My eyes were drawn as by a magnet to Judy's dressing table.

That was when I really knew that this kid, Pat Smith, was just as tough as they come.

That was when I realized that Judy, whom I had loved for the past four years but who had never really loved me, must have, somewhere along the line, learned to hate me.

That's my story, Father. That's my confession. Of course, you remember the trial. You remember when I was fighting for my life against a charge of being the murderer of Robert Heming, a man whom the State's Attorney said was my wife's lover.

You remember the testimony of my own attorney. He stood there and told the jury that I had made arrangements to give my wife, Judy, a divorce. And then, just two days before the shooting, how I had gone to him and changed my plans and said I would never give her up.

YOU REMEMBER the testimony of Pat Smith, himself. Pat who perjured himself when he told the judge and the jury that I had hired him as a spy to watch my wife and to report on her affair with this man Heming, whom I was accused of killing. You remem-

ber how he told the jury that I was desperately jealous and had threatened to kill Heming.

Of course you remember Judy's own story, which she gave to the newspapers after she realized she wouldn't be able to appear in court as a witness against me. How she told of going to a moving picture show with Pat on that Wednesday afternoon. And then having dinner with Pat, from six-thirty to seven-thirty, on the night of the murder. And about the witnesses who saw them at dinner. That was a diabolically clever touch.

And then, most damning of all, was the testimony of Heming's landlady. About the letter I was supposed to have sent him asking him to come to the house and wait for me. That the door would be open. That letter, written on my own typewriter, but which I never wrote, telling Heming that I was going to give Judy her freedom and to come and talk with me about it.

And so tonight, Father, I'm going to the electric chair for the murder of this man Robert Heming. And probably, within a week of the time the state buries my burned and shriveled body, Judy will collect the hundred thousand dollars insurance on my life. And she and this boy Pat Smith will be married and they will spend the money. In a way, it's a sort of wedding present from me to them.

I don't know if they'll ever be really happy.

For you can see what they have done to me. For although I planned to commit a double murder, I didn't actually commit any murder. I shot a man by accident and I shall pay for that with my life.

And that's why, Father, before I pass through that door in less than a half hour from now, I wanted to make this last confession.

I don't say that I didn't kill Robert Heming. I don't say that I didn't plan Judy's death and the death of Pat Smith or that I didn't plan to frame Pat for Judy's murder after I had killed him. But I do say that I never deliberately planned to kill Robert Heming, and that if I had not run into Pat Smith I might not be going through that little gray door tonight, alone.

So you may leave now, Father, and I guess that's everything I have to say, except that I hope Judy has finally found someone she is able to love.

● ● ●

treat me right

She shouldn't have done that to him! Didn't he always tell the truth about her? Always...

BY ROY CARROLL

BUDDY WAS ten when he came to live with Big Guy and his wife. Every time he arrived at a new place, he always had hope that it would be better than the others. Here he had his own room and that was an improvement, and the food was all right and there was a yard. It looked like it would be a whole lot better.

He *knew* it was going to be better, for Big Guy took him aside out back of the garage and slipped him a dollar bill. He'd never had a whole dollar in his life before.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," Big Guy said. "It takes ten-twelve days to get that furniture van to the coast and back."

I'd sure like to go on one of those trips, Buddy thought.

"Keep your eyes open, huh?" Big Guy said, and the way he said it Buddy just knew Big Guy meant his wife Edna who was sitting on the back steps.

Buddy nodded.

Every time Big Guy came home there was another dollar bill. He'd look at Buddy and Buddy would shake his head.

"No guys been coming around?" Big Guy said.

None had. Of course, Edna often went out at night and sometimes she didn't get back until three or four in the morning and once not until noon, but Big Guy wasn't asking that. Anyway, why cause trouble. This was the best place yet. Not that Edna was so great; in fact, the best thing was to stay out of her way.

But there were the guys at the sand-lot, and the crisp dollars, and he liked Big Guy. He hoped he'd be as big as Big Guy when he grew up.

They hadn't wanted him to play ball with them at first, but he'd pushed down the boy at home plate and grabbed the bat.

"It's my turn up," he said.

"Like hell it is," said a big kid of fourteen, the leader, and came at him. Buddy hit him in the chest with the bat and the boy went down, gasping. The others fell back.

He played ball that day and from then on.

Then he made the mistake with Edna. He came home one afternoon and the place was so quiet he figured she must have gone out, so he started exploring the house; he liked exploring. But when he went into Edna's room, there was Edna wearing almost nothing, sitting in front of the mirror curling her hair. He tried to slip out but she turned, startled. She jumped to her feet, holding her ear where the hot iron had touched it, and swearing something awful.

"You little hoodlum," she shouted and before he could dodge, he felt the hot searing slash as she hit him across the face with the curling iron.

Buddy had never felt such pain, even the whippings he got at the place before the last where the woman had beat him across the bare buttocks with willow switches. But he didn't cry out. Tears came to his eyes but he didn't sob, or cry.

"Now get out of here if you know what's good for you," Edna screamed, her face red and twisted, the veins popping out. Through the red veil of his pain, Buddy was still fascinated at the sight of her in panties and bra, but he only got a quick look for she pushed him out of the room and down the short hall to his bedroom. She slammed the door on him, and he heard the lock turn. The pain was bad and he couldn't understand why she was so mad, and he wished Big Guy were there.

HE LAY down on his bed and hoped the pain would

go away. He thought about everything he could think of that might make him forget the burn. He was pretty good at that. If he didn't like something, he could make it go away by thinking of something else. It was a trick and it was good to know. Whenever he got whipped or punished in some way, whenever he was hurt, he could get through it by thinking of something else. And if someone was yelling at him, he'd just not let his mind notice them.

But this time, it didn't work so well. The burn hurt too much. He went to the window and the breeze blowing on his face helped. He saw Edna go out, all dressed up, her high heels clicking on the street.

Buddy shinnied down a drain pipe outside his window, but when he got to the kitchen and made himself a sandwich, he felt too sick to eat it. He put some butter on the burn; then he went upstairs again.

He unlocked his door and fell onto the bed. He lay there thinking how foolish he was to hope this place would be better than the others.

A week later the burn on Buddy's face no longer hurt. But there was a big scab, black and ugly, and every time Buddy looked at himself in the mirror, he felt a new surge of eleven-year-old anger and frustration. When Big Guy saw it he'd fix Edna good, Buddy was sure.

But Big Guy didn't even notice it. When he got home Edna was out. He just got a quart of beer out of the refrigerator and sat drinking it on the front porch. Buddy sat down so the burned side of his face was toward Big Guy, but still Big Guy didn't see it. He kept looking up the street waiting for Edna. Buddy went into the backyard and worked on a wagon he was fixing up. He didn't really feel like it but back here mostly was where Big Guy slipped him the dollar bill.

After awhile Big Guy came back and crouched down beside him. He asked Buddy a few questions about the wagon and then he got to what was really on his mind.

"Okay, Pal," he said, "how about it?"

Always before Buddy had said that everything had been okay, but this time he didn't say anything. He was mad at Big Guy for not noticing his face. He didn't look up, just kept looking down at the ground saying nothing.

"Look at me," Big Guy grabbed his shoulders "She's been up to something, hasn't she?" Big Guy's hand was hurting him and Buddy thought how that same hand could hurt Edna—the way she had hurt him. "Tell me!" Big Guy said, shaking him so hard his teeth rattled.

Buddy said nothing.

The big guy's fingers held his arms like they were caught in a shut door, but Buddy concentrated on making the hurt go away and it did. But the big guy's voice was there, probing at him. "There was, *wasn't there?* Don't lie to me. Look at me. Tell me! This time there *was* a guy, wasn't there? I can tell by the way you're acting."

Nothing, say nothing, Buddy's mind told him. He just let his head hang.

THE NEXT thing he knew he was on the ground where the big guy had flung him. He was watching the big guy move toward the house. Only he was a little surprised because the big guy didn't seem to be in any hurry, didn't look angry, even. His huge shoulders slumped almost as though he was tired or something. He didn't even slam the door when he went inside.

When Edna came home Buddy waited and listened, but nothing happened inside the house. After awhile he went back to playing with his wagon. Suppertime came and the three sat around the table, no one saying much. Buddy went to bed at eight and had hardly pulled the covers up when the argument started below. He could hear Big Guy's accusing voice, and then Edna was saying something he couldn't make out.

Buddy got out of bed and listened at the door. The voices got louder and louder. Then he heard what he had been waiting for, the sharp smack of hand hitting flesh. He went back to bed.

Below him the sounds got even louder. Edna cursed in a high shrill voice. There were the thumps of furniture overturning, the tinkle of breaking glass.

And then it got very quiet. Buddy heard footsteps coming up the stairs. He closed his eyes and pretended he was asleep. The door to his room creaked open and Big Guy's harsh, heavy breathing seemed everywhere.

"Kid—"

Buddy was careful to breathe deeply and slowly. He heard the shuffle as Big Guy came close to his bed. He could imagine Big Guy there, towering over him, and he was frightened. It took all his will power to keep breathing slowly and carefully and he did it by using his trick; he pretended Big Guy wasn't really there at all and the next thing he knew, Big Guy clumped down the stairs and he heard the screen door slam and heavy footsteps cross the porch.

He didn't go to sleep right away—he didn't want to. He wanted to think some more of Big Guy's hands raising welts on her flesh, welts that in his mind looked just like the hot iron mark on his face. He thought he heard noises downstairs, a few moans and some furniture being pushed around or something like that, sort of scraping noises. Twice he thought he heard his name called, but he didn't get up to answer.

IT WAS LATE the next morning when he awoke. The house was quiet. He went downstairs and brought in the milk and paper. He ate cereal and milk and a banana he'd found and looked at the funnies in the newspaper. Then he took one of his dollar bills from where he kept them in the kitchen and went out.

He stayed out all day. When the other kids left the ball field to go home for lunch, he went to a diner nearby and ate a big plate of spaghetti and had a double chocolate fudge sundae. Then he walked two miles to the river. He cut a willow pole and a man fishing from the bridge gave him an old line and a hook and sinker, even loaned him some bait. The man said it was good for a boy to spend some of his summer vacation fishing. Buddy fished all afternoon. He caught three fish.

When it got dark, he went back to Big Guy's house. No one was there. He made himself a bologna sandwich, then decided to do what he had always wanted to do, just eat bologna plain. He found some chocolate syrup and mixed that in his milk. He opened a can of shredded cocoanut and ate most of that while sitting on the couch watching television. He didn't turn on the lights in the living room, just the television set. The room was still a mess from the fight, but he didn't bother to straighten it

up. There were some cigarettes and he smoked a couple of them until he started feeling sick.

He did a lot of things that night which he wasn't supposed to do, like play with the good deck of cards and eat brown sugar straight (Edna wouldn't let him, said it caused worms). He ate a whole can of peaches, then he went back and looked at television right through the late movie to the sign-off. Then he went upstairs to bed. He was tired and he went right to sleep.

He got up late the next morning, fried himself a lot of bacon and eggs for breakfast. It was too late to play ball. The others would be going home for lunch, so he stayed around the yard awhile. He found the remains of a bird that had been killed by a cat and he amused himself by making a coffin from a box, digging a grave and burying it. He even picked some flowers to put on the grave.

He got his fishing pole again, dug up some worms, and was just starting for the river when the woman next door, a Mrs. Halleck, called to him.

"Buddy," she said, "is everything all right over at your house?"

"Sure," he said.

"I haven't seen Edna," she said. "Is she sick or anything?"

"Not that I know of." He edged away. He didn't want to think about Edna.

ON HIS WAY to the river he bought six different kinds of candy bars and three different flavors of soda with what was left of the five dollars Big Guy had given him. He bought a pocket knife at another store—he'd always wanted one—and a yo-yo that he had trouble working.

He had been fishing for about an hour when the police cruiser drew up and a young, round-faced policeman got out and came down to the bank where he was sitting.

"How's the fishing?" he said.

"I got two already," Buddy said.

"Is your name Buddy?" the policeman asked.

Buddy nodded.

"I think you had better come along with me," he said in a kindly tone, "there's been a little trouble."

There were a lot of people around the house when they

got there, police cars and an ambulance. Some of the boys he played ball with were there too. Buddy felt very proud; none of them had ever ridden in a police car.

"We found the kid," the policeman said to a man in a gray suit. The man took Buddy's hand and led him around to the back of the house and into the kitchen.

"I'm Detective Miller," he said. "I want you to tell me everything that happened here."

"Nothing happened," Buddy said. The detective looked up at the others and sighed a long sigh.

"Do you know where your mother is?"

"You mean Edna?" Buddy said.

"You've been living here by yourself. You had to see her there behind the sofa the way her arms stuck out—"

"Who?" Buddy said. The detective sighed again. But the detective didn't know, of course, about his secret trick.

"It looks like there was an awful fight," the detective said. "Did you hear any arguing anytime?"

"No," Buddy said.

"Did she have any visitors?"

"I don't know," Buddy said. "I don't know anything."

"Well, kid," the detective said, "didn't you even wonder where your mother was?"

"She's not my mother," Buddy said.

A policeman said that was right, the neighbors said he had only been there a few months.

"Well," the detective said, "he can sure take care of himself."

Buddy sat there, his face impassive. He was still practicing his secret trick.

There was a bustle as a policeman came in and Buddy dimly heard something about "the husband heard about it on the radio and turned himself in."

"Headquarters says he admits slapping her around," the policeman said, "but she was breathing when he took off on his run."

"He'll get ten for manslaughter," somebody said.

BUDDY HARDLY heard them. He knew what was coming next and he was not

surprised at the official-looking woman who knelt beside him and said he was to come with her. It was over. It could have been good, but it wasn't. And it probably never would be.

He went upstairs with the woman and let her help him pack. He didn't have much. She sent him into the bathroom to wash his hands, which he did slowly and carefully. He looked at himself in the mirror. The scab had come off, but the flesh looked red and angry. He fingered it gently. He thought of all the other times he had been beaten or ignored at all the other places he had stayed.

Now it would be different. He had found out something very important. He smiled at his sudden new knowledge, his sense of power.

"They better treat me right," he whispered to himself in the mirror. "They just better treat me right."

And way down deep he felt a tingle of anticipation, a half-formed wish that they wouldn't treat him right.

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Alcoholic Alibi

He was not drunk, he told the Dallas, Texas policemen. He hadn't touched a drop.

The 43-year old man was stopped when police saw him tottering down the street. His breath reeked of whisky.

Police informed him of these facts after his denial.

"Right!" he said. "My wife was drunk when I left home. I got this way just kissing her goodbye."

getaway!

He had the girl, the fast car and the money. All he had to do was make it over the border.

BY EDWARD D. HOCH

THIS WAS it!

This was the moment of victory, of escape, of climax for all those years of planning.

And, strangely enough, it was just the way Hal Martin had pictured it would be, when he was a tough kid back in Brooklyn. He remembered his dreams very well, because there hadn't been much else to do except dream—and shoot pool, and roll drunks.

And all that time he'd dreamt about this day. When he would be driving a speeding car through the mists of evening, with a beautiful girl at his side and all the money in the world in a suitcase in the back seat.

And that was just the way it turned out.

The girl was named Dawn. Dawn Withers. It wasn't her real name, but that didn't matter to Hal Martin. He'd known her ever since he'd come to River City with his phony charity racket. She'd worked with him through the whole thing, and now she was with him at the end.

"It'll be two days before those suckers catch on to how I took them, baby. And by that time we'll be halfway to the North Pole."

"How much money is back there, Hal?"

"All the money in the world, baby. All the money in the world. Enough to buy you everything you'll ever want."

The headlights cut through the mist ahead, showing nothing but the tree-lined road and the blackness of the night.

"Light me a cigarette, baby."

"Sure. . . .Hal, how much further is it?"

"We'll make Canada in another hour. After that they'll never find us."

"Never?"

"Never, baby. I planned this for years. I planned it all through Brooklyn and the army and two years in jail. I planned every inch of it, from the moment I stepped off the train in River City, to this moment."

"This moment?"

"A fast car, a beautiful woman, and all the money in the world. That's all I ever wanted. And I've got all three."

"They'll come after us, though."

"No, they won't, baby. And if they do, they'll never find us. I figured everything. I figured every angle."

Up, over the crest of a hill, and then down the other side into the valley, the twin beams of white light shooting ahead of them, guiding them, leading them...

As they reached the crest of the next hill, the radio picked up the first faint sounds of music.

"That's a Canadian station," Hal said. "We're nearly there."

"Yes."

"Tell me something, baby. Was this your dream, too?"

"I suppose so. In a way. I always wanted to marry the richest man in town and have him carry me away in his car."

Hal laughed. "Well, you did it, baby. That's what you did. I'm sure the richest man in River City tonight. I've got all the money in the world right in the back seat."

"Hal, you know, you really don't have *all* the money in the world back there."

"No, but I've got plenty. I've got $108,775.20. I counted it myself—twice."

"They sure were suckers back in River City."

"Baby, the world is full of suckers. It just takes a fellow like me to find them all."

The headlights swept on, catching for a moment a battered road sign: CANADA—15 MILES.

"Not far now, baby. Not far now."

Not far now...

HIS EYES watched the miles pass through the night outside. The road ahead was the same. It never changed. Mile after mile, it was the same.

The radio grew louder, and

they could distinguish the lazy melody of "Blue Room."

"I always liked that song, Hal."

"Remind me to buy you the record, baby. They can play it at our wedding."

"How much did you say was back there, Hal?"

"How much what, baby?"

"Money."

"Oh. $108,775.20. Right to the penny."

"That's a lot of money, Hal."

"It sure is, baby. It sure is."

CANADA—2 MILES.

"Two more miles, baby."

"Hal. . . ."

"What, baby?"

"I'm afraid, Hal."

"Afraid? Why? Nothing can go wrong."

"What if they're waiting for us at the border?"

He tried to laugh. "That's crazy. They probably don't even know we're gone yet."

"But what if they're there."

"Nuts."

"Hal, do you have a gun?"

"In the glove compartment. You might as well get it out just in case. I've got to slow down now for the border guards."

She took out the snub-nosed .38 revolver.

The lights of the border town blazed at them out of the night and Hal slowed the car to a halt before a striped barrier that blocked the road.

"You know, Hal, we're not going to get away with it."

"Shut up, of course we are!"

The border guard walked toward the car.

"Hal," she cried, "I'm scared."

He slapped her hard. "Snap out of it! You want to ruin everything!"

Dawn started sobbing.

"Shut up! If he hears you— Give me that gun!"

As Hal tried to yank the gun from her, it went off, and he felt the bullet breeze past his head.

"Damn!" He shoved down on the gas and rocketed the car through the barrier.

"Hal!" Dawn screamed. "You'll kill us!"

"You've ruined everything!" he shouted.

"Hal! Hal!"

After its impact with the barrier, the car weaved to the left, went off the road.

Hal saw the tree coming at them. He struggled with the steering wheel to avoid it, but the car crashed head-on into the tree.

He saw Dawn slump forward in her seat. He also saw.

them coming, running across the field toward the wrecked car. He climbed out. He threw open the rear door and tried to pull out the big suitcase full of money. It weighed a ton. He jerked and tugged and, finally, got it out of the car. Then he staggered and almost fell trying to run with it.

But Hal wouldn't drop the suitcase. That money was part of his dream. It and a fast car and a beautiful woman.

He cursed the charity rackets because half the money you collected was always in silver. Futilely, he tried to run on, but the police were practically on him.

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Trouble For Casanova

In Mexico City. Enrique Villanueva was jailed for seducing a minor.

While in prison, three young girls, Maria Pantoja, Maria de la Paz Granados and Esther Jacques Montiel strangers to one another, went to Penal Court to visit their husbands. While waiting for the men to come from their cells, there was friendly talk between the three. Maria Pantoja noticed that Maria de la Paz was wearing a dress similar to one she had discarded. Her husband had told her that the dress was out of style and that he would buy her a new one.

Not three men. but one man was led from his cell—Enrique Villanueva—the husband of the three girls.

After some arguing between the girls as to the rightful owner of this forgetful man, Villanueva spoke up and said he would take Maria Pantoja as his real wife—they have a child, he explained.

But the hassle didn't end there. Villanueva's chosen wife wanted to know what the other woman was doing in *her* dress.

At this point, Enrique fled back to the refuge of his cell.

first man caught

This was an international killing. A tough nut for anybody to crack.

BY LEE E. WELLS

1.

FROM HIS office window, Frank Teague could see the high, steel mesh fence that divided this side of the street from the Mexican side and, lifting his eyes he could see the Sonora Hills pressing in upon the city from both sides of the border. Fretfully, Teague pushed his fingers through his sandy red hair.

Traffic both ways funnelled into the wide break in the fence where officers of two nations briefly but sharply checked each car and pedestrian. Teague's uniform was almost like theirs, except for a touch of green. And he was aware of the weight of the gold badge on his left shirt pocket, sergeant of the sheriff's force. He wondered now how long he'd wear it. Until tomorrow? Next week? Surely very soon they'd demote him back where he belonged.

He turned impatiently from the window, cursing his own inadequacy, feeling again the flood of embarrassment he had known when he learned that the slippery narcotics smuggler, Luis Zira, had tricked him out of position and had later been captured by sheer,

freakish luck two hundred miles away. Webb had said perfunctorily that it eventually happened to every officer, but Teague didn't wholly believe him. A hell of a fine sergeant! The whole force would be chuckling about this and he'd be lucky if he didn't lose his promotion.

He dropped into the chair behind his desk, half listening to the teletype from the other room, the murmur of Brayton's heavy voice. Teague's blue eyes darkened as he scowled at a wall map of the county and his blunt fingers drummed impatiently on the desk. Maybe he could redeem himself before the wheels of demotion started turning. Maybe he could recover the stature he'd lost in Mary's eyes, and lose that hot, inner feeling of failure when Jerry crawled up in his lap and asked Daddy to tell him what happened today—in his eager, crazy kind of hero worship.

Teague glanced at the clock and his square-jawed face fell. Hot as this stretch of the border was, what could happen in fifteen minutes before he went off duty? Hope must be deferred another day—then another, and another.

Then Brayton stood in the doorway, his bulk filling the opening. "Car Five, Sergeant. Some kid hunting jacks found a stiff up in the head of a box canyon."

"Some wetback or drunken border jumper?" Teague asked.

"The kid says the guy's dressed mighty fine. Crane radioed in the first report. They had to leave the highway and tramp way back in the hills."

Teague stood up with a new, burgeoning hope. Maybe—just maybe. He glanced at the clock—thirteen minutes later and someone else would've got the call.

"You go with me, Brayton. Might be something for us, or the border patrol. I'll be with you in two minutes."

Brayton nodded and vanished. Teague grabbed his hat, circled the desk, stopped short. He picked up the phone and called Mary.

"I'll be late, Doll. They found a dead man up in the hills. Might be an hour, might be all night. I'll grab a bite in town—you and Jerry have dinner."

"Be careful, Frank."

"Sure, Doll. Sure."

He cradled the phone and his tanned face gave little hint of the warmth that Mary's

constant concern always roused in him. Maybe this thing up in the hills—he clamped down on the thought and hurried outside where Brayton waited in the fast, powerful car.

HALF AN hour later Teague crouched over the body. It lay under a palo verde tree at the far end of a nameless canyon deep in a jumble of broken hills north and west of the town. Brayton and the other deputy looked their questions at Teague, as he dusted the knees of his trousers and straightened.

"Knifed in the back, that's plain enough. Dressed like he came from the east, maybe Chicago or New York, somewhere like that."

"How'd he get up here?" Brayton growled, looking around at the barren, rocky walls of the canyon. "Uranium hunting?"

"In that outfit?" Teague asked shortly and signalled the other deputy to take pictures. "He was far away from here when someone slid that shiv into him. They didn't want the body found too close to home. There's marks where his heels dragged."

He pointed a few feet away and Brayton nodded, then frowned. "For about twenty feet, but it's a good mile to the highway after you get out of this canyon."

"We didn't look for trail coming in," Teague said. "We will going out." He looked at the slack dead face again, that of a studious man in his late thirties, the glazed, brown eyes staring vacantly, the faint black shadow of a stubble showing on the long, bony jaw. Teague licked his lips thoughtfully. "Reminds me of someone—yet I never saw him before."

He was so close to knowing that it annoyed him. And certainty grew that this was just the case that would redeem him on the force, and at home.

With a word to Brayton, Teague moved back down the canyon, watching the rocky ground for sign. He found it—twice, once half way through the canyon and again at its mouth, the twin grooves in the dirt that could only be the marks of dragging heels. Brayton saw them, too.

"You're right, Frank. It must have been a hell of a job to lug him up here."

"It was," Teague answered shortly, "for one man."

Brayton stared, his pursy

mouth dropping open. "One!"

"Sure. Otherwise they wouldn't have stopped so often. Or, if they had, they wouldn't have dragged his feet but would have picked him up right away. We'll find more marks."

They did, between the canyon mouth and the highway, leading to a spot on the road several yards south of the waiting police car. Then they drove back to the border city, Brayton silent, fleshy face puzzled as he watched the highway unroll before them. Teague still tried to place the dead man, but identification eluded him.

Brayton broke the thoughtful silence. "Reckon he was knifed across the Border?" He shook his head in answer to his own question. "Nope—too hard to get him over the fence."

"Maybe," Teague said. "But it goes through some lonely country. Can't patrol it all."

Brayton, however, might have an angle. An international killing could lead to Luis Zira, the smart boy down there who seemed to be in the shadows behind every racket and yet kept his nose so clean that nothing could be pinned on him. Now, getting Zira would be a feather for Teague! But this would pull in the Rurales, the Border Patrol, maybe the FBI. Still, Teague might have a chance, however slim, to wrap this up in a hurry, all by himself.

BACK AT headquarters, Teague checked on "wants" from the local police in the in the state—nothing there. Then his face lighted and he snapped his fingers. Federal! A confidential bulletin he had seen two days before.

He hastily scanned it and the dead man fitted the description of Harry Malon, a research physicist from Cleveland who had suddenly disappeared. There was something else...newspaper. He hurried back into his office and rummaged among the pile of papers under the phone book. He searched through page after page and gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

The dead man looked at him from among a dozen pictures on a page of news shots of two days ago. Harry Malon had suddenly disappeared from his usual haunts. His employers, an electronics firm in Cleveland working on government contracts, believed he

had been kidnapped or murdered. They did not state what kind of work Malon had been doing, but hinted it was quite advanced and hush-hush.

Teague slapped the photograph triumphantly with the back of his hand. He whirled his chair around to his desk and picked up the phone, placed a call to the FBI headquarters in Phoenix. He identified himself to the suave quiet voice that answered.

"What's this about Malon?" he then asked.

"Something on him, Sergeant?"

"Maybe. Look, if he was kidnapped or murdered like the papers say, why are you boys putting a want on him?"

"There is the chance, Sergeant, that he was neither."

"Just skipping, is that it?" Teague asked quickly. "With a bunch of secrets—"

"Guesses, Sergeant," the voice cut in. "We'd just like to make certain."

Teague grinned, enjoying this, knowing for sure now that his prayers had been answered. His grip tightened on the phone as he leaned back in the chair. "Don't worry about him any more." he said. "We've got him down here."

"What!" The voice snapped and crackled with swift authority. "Hold him! Let no one come hear him! We'll be right down as quickly as—"

"Oh, no hurry," Teague said. "He won't go anywhere or talk to anyone. He's dead. Someone slid a knife between his ribs from the back."

There was a dead silence and then the voice returned, suave again. "You have the body, Sergeant?"

"We found it up in the hills. I'm just checking identity."

"Very good, Sergeant. We'll still be right down. Don't admit anyone to the body or take anything."

"Damn little to take," Teague grunted. "Even his billfold was empty."

"We'll still be down, Sergeant. We'd appreciate it if you didn't give this to the papers until we can look around. Okay?"

"By me," Teague agreed.

HE HUNG up the phone and looked at it for a moment. Then he stirred and walked swiftly to Lieutenant Webb and passed on the word from the FBI.

"Something big?" Webb said.

"Yes, sir," Teague answered.

Webb glanced at the clock. "You're working late, Frank. Better go home before Mary sends the kid for you."

Teague laughed, s a l u t e d and left. Outside the door, his smile sickened and vanished. Webb sounded almost relieved that someone else would take over from Sergeant Teague. Maybe it was unfair to the Old Man, for Webb had excused that bad slip of two weeks ago. Still, if the FBI wasn't taking over, Teague might be in charge. Maybe that's why the Old Man had been so glad—

Teague sternly told himself that he read too many things into the tone of a voice. He was too touchy. He went to his office just long enough to get his hat and then left the building.

It was like Mary to have waited dinner an hour for him. She and Jerry were just finishing as he came in.

After dinner, Teague sat on the davenport before the television, Jerry on his lap. Then with a glance at the clock, he took the kid upstairs and as he u n d r e s s e d, with an occasional assist from Teague with shoe laces and buttons, there was a report of the day. No, he had chased no bandits over the hills and there had been no foreign agent lurking around the corner of the Safeway Store. Mary came for the tucking-in, and joined Teague later downstairs.

He told her about Malon and that he wanted to keep ahead of the pack where chance had placed him. It could mean a big step forward in erasing that blunder. He paced restlessly as he spoke and then bent to kiss her.

"So I'll wander around a bit tonight, Doll. Not long—just enough to catch a rumble if it's going around."

"Over the Fence?" s h e asked. He straightened.

"Over the Fence," he nodded. "Moreles might have a line, or I could pick up a hint. The word travels faster over there."

Her hand rested on his cheek and her head was back, looking up at him. "Why, Frank? Don't you see enough dark alleys?"

His eyes grew bleak. He shoved his hands in his pockets and each word came with an effort. "I have to, Doll. I have to prove myself to Webb."

He h u r r i e d upstairs to change his clothes. He knew that she understood that he

had to follow this thing through. She waited for him when he came down in civvies, and she kissed him, slowly and tenderly.

"Be careful, Frank." She added, with a lighter note, "Wait up?"

"Might be late, Doll." His finger traced the curve of her lip. "I'll be back—in one piece. I promise."

IN LESS than an hour Teague pulled his car to the curb before the Rurales station on the Avenida Obregon. The streets were filled with the shifting crowd of a Mexican border town and the Avenida itself glowed with lights from a hundred tourist traps—curio shops, liquor stores, leather shops. The soft voice of Mexico spoke all about him, laughing, sad, soft, strident, eager, cajoling, proud and fawning. He crossed the walk, brushing aside an urchin who pressed packages of American gum upon him. Inside the main room, the desk sergeant's dark face lighted.

"Senor Teague. *Bien Venido!*"

"El Capitan Moreles?" Teague asked.

"He will be glad to see you." Moreles was an olive skinned man with a wisp of a mustache and a swift, white smile that did not hide the firm set of his jaw and the piercing look of his dark eyes. He welcomed Teague and offered cigarettes. Teague accepted and sat down as Moreles flicked a lighter and held a flame. Teague glanced at the littered desk.

"You're busy."

"Always." Moreles sighed. The overhead light touched and deepened the lines around his fine mouth. "Official visit—or as a friend?"

"Both, Mateo. Unofficially official, if you get the idea."

Moreles smiled. "It is not hard to follow."

Teague made a gesture northward. "What happens up there sometimes starts down here, and things start up there that end down here. One way or the other—"

"We clean up for the other," Moreles nodded. "What is it?"

"Heard any rumble about a knifing?" Teague asked. "Up in the hills to the north?"

Moreles considered a moment. "None."

Teague made a grimace. "Heard anything about one Harry Malon?"

Moreles chuckled. "*Si*, from the Federal District. We watch

for him because your country request it." He sobered. "You think he has come this way?"

"He didn't make it," Teague studied his cigarette. "He tangled with a knife. You can call your boys off, Mateo. He's on a slab in the coroner's office right now."

"So!" Moreles' black brows arched. He sighed. "It is one less problem for us. But does he bring you here? Why?"

"Damned if I know, Mateo," Teague said. "Hunch—maybe even less than that. One thing, this is big—international. Malon headed for here, but it's an even bet he didn't plan to stay. He was on his way somewhere else."

Moreles nodded, folded his hands and squinted his eyes against the curl of smoke from his cigarette. "As you say—I buy that. So?"

"Zira—Luis Zira," Teague said. "This is a job about his size."

Moreles removed the cigarette and crushed it out with a distasteful twist of his mouth. "Zira! *Si,* it could be as you say. But, *amigo,* no one has ever yet placed anything upon Luis Zira. I am told today, *por ejemplo,* that two men, Montoya and Jesus Garcia, are found up in the hills with bullets in their skulls. It is said they have work for Zira... now they are dead. But is there a single lead back to him? No! He is very sad when he heard the news. They will have a big funeral. *Si!*"

"Sounds like some of our Chicago boys," Teague grunted.

"I find at his place two strangers—not American, maybe Europe. Senor Zira say they are his guests. I do not like the looks of their passports and I suspicion they are not in order." Moreles shrugged. "Yet it will take some time to make sure of this, and by then I bet you a thousand pesos they are gone."

"Hold 'em," Teague said.

"For what? Why?" Moreles shook his head. "It is like this curio shop of Zira's that I think is a cover but I have yet to prove it. The whisper says that his real *patron* is in Mexico City—a syndicate, as you call it, all over the world. I would like to put Luis Zira in jail, but..." He shrugged and then asked hopefully. "You have something that leads to him?"

"No," Teague confessed. "Just following a hunch of a deputy. Thought something might've happened down here

that ended in a box canyon up there. No trouble the last two nights?"

"Not from those who seek to cross the Line," Moreles said. He spread his hands wide. "I am of no help."

"Maybe next time," Teague said and arose.

HE RETURNED to the street, Moreles' regrets still ringing in his ears. Mateo meant them, Teague knew, and he could depend upon cooperation as the case continued—if Teague would still be on it. The kid with the gum was still insistent, but Teague said, *"No, gracias,"* thoughtfully looking at the lights of the Avenida Obregon.

He decided to walk the two blocks to the San Marcos bar, have a drink and call it a night. Zira's curio shop was just up the street and he must necessarily pass it to reach the San Marcos. He strolled along, letting the crowd carry him, importuned a dozen times to buy gum, have his shoes shined, be guided to the brighter spots of the town. Teague only smiled and shook his head.

Luis Zira made no proclamations, even before the narrow, open front room of his shop. The cases were filled with jewelry, authentic Indian and the stuff that was factory made. There was an overpowering odor of leather. Bright lights reflected from glass, cases, and zarapes made a violent mass of color at the rear of the shop. But Zira's name did not appear; Zira's clerk did not stand at the edge of the walk and cajole tourists to come in.

She stood at the end of a counter near the back, talking to a man whose fist was clenched on the glass of the case. He made a swift slash with his hand and then leaned toward her to talk in a low, intense tone.

Teague stood on the edge of the curb, masked by the shifting, passing crowd. The place looked innocent—a typical, American-dollars trap. But there was a surprising, faint air of disuse, a feeling that not too many came to haggle and buy. The stock looked as if each item had been there for some time, handled perhaps, but no one had made a real effort to sell.

The woman held Teague's interest. He had expected flashing, bold eyes and an Indian blouse cut low over a full-blown bosom. But she

didn't fit the picture. Her hair was dark, right enough, and caught gleams from the unshielded lights above. Her figure had pleasing curves and was youthful enough, but there were deep lines in the face—half-mooning the long cheeks—and shadows under the eyes. She wore a full skirt and Indian blouse, but the skin about the neck and throat looked old. The heavy turquoise and silver bracelets were much too large for arms that seemed little more than bones.

Maybe it was smart of Zira, after all, the clerk just another part of the camouflage. Now the man leaned closer to the woman. That wasn't an argument over the price of a leather belt or an Indian basket. Impulse moved Teague across the walk and into the store.

Both of them wheeled about and Teague's policeman instincts scented alarm. The man was of medium height, but so thin he appeared much taller. His hair was scant, once black, but now a hopeless and dingy gray at the temples. Faded blue eyes widened in undisguised fear.

He threw a swift glance at the woman. "I'll see you around, Rita."

SHE NODDED and now Teague saw that some of the man's uneasiness was reflected in her dark eyes. The man scuttled about Teague and was lost in the crowd. The woman remained by the counter, leaning on it as if she needed its support. Teague was used to uneasiness and fear. It seemed to be born in those who moved about in the half lights and shadows of the border town, making their living as they could. But here was something a little more. This woman watched Teague as a rabbit would a predator. He had no illusions that he could pass as anything but a cop, not down here.

"Zira around?" he asked.

She shook her head. Her eyes shifted away to the busy street as though she longed for refuge there. She found her tongue. "You've got no right this side of the Fence. I don't have to answer any questions. You can't flash your badge in Mexico."

Teague's smile was without humor. "Now what makes you nervous about an off-duty policeman?"

"Who you kidding!" she demanded. Then she realized she had aroused suspicion and she

tried to cover it with a wan smile. "So I had the wrong idea. But it always adds up a copper never comes this side of the Fence to buy a zarape. He's always looking for someone or chasing down a rumble."

"You've been around," Teague said noncommittally. "What's your name?"

"Rita Ellis."

"Live down here?"

"No...on the other side."

Teague studied her. "And your friend?"

"What's he to you? Just a friend."

"Any reason I shouldn't know his name?"

Her haunting fear deepened and she glanced again toward the crowded walk, seemed to take courage in it. Her really fine eyes swung back to Teague, held defiantly a moment, then shifted away.

"Longcor," she said in a low voice. "Dave Longcor. Look, mister, I don't know what you've got in mind. Maybe we acted kind of funny, but Dave and me have been kicked around—plenty."

"By me?" Teague asked.

"No. But a woman drifting around like me gets plenty of shoving. Guys in flop houses through no fault of their own, like Dave, get a rough time from you cops."

"He's your—husband?"

"No," she said, but her tired face softened so that it had a touch of real beauty. "We never met before we landed here. I kind of wish we had—years ago. Things might've been different."

Her voice drifted off and Teague understood. There was nothing here and he was out of bounds. Rita Ellis would know little or nothing; she was just a troubled woman who unwittingly fronted Zira's more shadowy enterprises. Teague turned sharply away. He had almost reached the sidewalk when the woman called, pleading.

"Mister, leave him alone, will you? He's doing better. Maybe he'll get back on his feet and amount to something, like he did once."

Teague looked at her, but did not reply. He saw that something close to panic lurked close to the surface. He mingled with the crowd, headed toward the San Marcos and the drink he had promised himself.

2.

THE PATRONS of the San Marcos Bar were mostly

Americans, though here and there a Mexican merchant or broker quietly made deals that involved cattle, cotton or ore. Teague sat on one of the plush bar stools and took a long time with his drink. He had drawn a blank, as Moreles had hinted he might. Slipping Malon across the border was a job of the caliber of Luis Zira, but that was as far as Teague could go.

Teague sipped his drink and his thoughts turned to Longcor—David Longcor. He frowned at his dark reflection in the bar mirror and some faint memory stirred. He couldn't place it. Border cities saw too many strangers. Yet somewhere in the past he had come across that name.

"Senor Teague."

He swung around to find that Luis Zira had come up to the bar. Zira glanced at the vacant stool next to Teague.

"If you can spare the time," Teague said, "for a policeman."

Zira smiled and sat down. He was slender, his skin smooth under the dim lights of the lounge. The black line of the mustache seemed pasted to the long upper lip. His eyes were deep set, dark. Teague looked about as the bartender hurried up, but he could not spot the bodyguards he was certain Zira would have always with him. Zira ordered a drink, opened a cigarette case and offered one that Teague refused. He lit his own and Teague waited, wary.

"I'd not expect you down here, Senor. Except—"

"Off duty," Teague grunted. He wondered how Zira would look in coarse prison garb instead of the expensive dark suit he wore, the hand painted tie, the costly links in the shirt cuffs.

Zira nodded and sampled the drink.

Teague toyed with his own. "Curious?" he asked suddenly.

Zira's dark brow arched. "Not very, except that you have visit at my curio shop."

"Your help's well trained. Did she send the gum-selling *muchacho* to tell you?"

Zira laughed and the sound was carefree. "Senor, you are too suspicious. I happened by just as you leave. I had already planned to come here for a drink. As for well trained help, you might be interested to know that I plan to discharge the woman. She—drinks too much, I have discovered."

"From you, that *is* a new angle."

Zira shrugged. "I am a business man."

"Mmm," Teague commented. He watched Zira as closely as he could in the half light. "Something north of the Fence worry you?"

ZIRA LOOKED blank, and Teague could not tell if it was assumed or real. The man's teeth flashed in a swift smile.

"I am busy enough down here, Senor."

"Burying your own boys?"

"Ah, you have heard! Again too much drink, Teague. When the aquardiente flows, knife blades gleam and guns come out too quickly. I would have discharged them, too, but—"

"I bet," Teague growled and downed his drink. He signalled the bartender and paid his bill. He arose and stood looking down at Zira, who lifted his eyes curiously.

"Pay us a visit sometime," Teague said. "It'd be a pleasure to arrange free board and room for you."

"You are kind," Zira said softly and again his smile flashed. "But not now, Senor, if you will forgive me. I have much to do here."

Teague nodded and knew he had no chance in this exchange. He shoved his hands in his pockets and walked out of the San Marcos, back down the Avenida Obregon.

He passed the curio shop again, masked by the crowd. The woman was busy with a customer, so Teague walked on and climbed into his car. He maneuvered into line at the border and stopped at the barrier. An immigration officer peered in the window and grinned.

"How's crime, Teague?"

"Flourishing. You getting your share?"

"Win a little, lose a little."

The officer then asked the usual questions as to things Teague might have bought, then waved him through.

Teague drove away, following the cars ahead. Neon signs proclaimed chain stores and there was a bright neatness to the buildings north of the Fence. He thought he might stop by the office and see what had happened, then changed his mind. Mary would be waiting.

Traffic thinned quickly, the motels catching most of those who did not want to spend the night in Mexico. Teague followed the curve of the street

and then his headlights picked up a man striding along the sidewalk. There was something familiar about the lean figure. Longcor! The man threw a swift glance over his shoulder.

Teague wheeled to the curb. Longcor's stride broke as Teague spoke out the car window. "I'll give you a lift."

Longcor came to the car, peered at Teague and recognized him. He straightened with a jerk, half turned, caught himself, licked his lips.

"It's not far," he said. "It'd be too much bother."

"Nonsense." Teague opened the door. "Get in."

Longcor stood indecisive and then climbed in. He looked sharply at Teague as he closed the door and, in answer to Teague's question, said that he was on his way to the Colonial Club at the northern outskirts of town. Teague showed his surprise and Longcor smiled.

"I'm a waiter there...nothing more."

His voice was surprisingly soft and modulated. The dash light revealed a deeply scored face, a long and bony jaw and a cleft chin that could have been stronger. The man's knobby fingers were folded in his lap and Teague saw that the knuckles were white. This man was afraid. Teague spoke of the warm night. Longcor replied politely, but shortly.

He looked stonily out the windshield as he said, "You're a sheriff. What do you want with me?"

"No idea?" Teague asked, fishing.

"I haven't been drunk and disorderly in six months. I have a job, such as it is, a home of sorts. So what do you want?"

"Where do you live?" Teague asked.

Longcor gave an address near the high mesh fence, a scabrous area that was a duplicate of the sore spots below the border. Not much good came out of that small district.

"You just came back through the gate," Teague said.

"I go every night. The immigration men can tell you. What do you want with me?"

Teague sensed a note of alarm, instantly covered. "Rita gave you quite a buildup." He saw the neon of the Colonial Club just ahead. There were a few cars in the parking lot, but in an hour or so the place would be jammed. "What makes you two so nervous?"

Longcor's lips opened, then

snapped shut. He shrugged. "Nothing. Maybe we've just had too much copper to do us much good."

TEAGUE stopped in the gravelled lot. Longcor opened the door, thanked him and stepped aside to watch Teague wheel around and drive out to the highway. Teague swung around the curve and, hidden from the club, pulled to the shoulder. Hunch and vague memory rode him, strengthened by that strange sense that tells a policeman something is wrong.

He lit a cigarette, took a couple of drags and then started the motor again. He made a swift U-turn in the wide highway and drove back into the Colonial Club parking lot. More cars had come in the brief time and Longcor was nowhere in sight.

Teague entered, taking the door that led to the cocktail lounge. The bar was busy and separated from the main room by a panelled wall. Teague took a table that would let him watch the dining room through a wide, low door. He saw Longcor, now wearing a tux, welcome a couple as they approached a table.

Teague sauntered to the bar and the attendant gave him directions to the manager's office. The manager had a dark face and a worried look in his eyes that increased when Teague inquired about Longcor.

"I've had Dave about a month now. I believe he's an alcoholic, though he never drinks on the job. He's never been late or absent and the customers like him."

"Know anything personal about him?"

"Not much. Comes from the East, I think. One of the bus boys lives down in his district and he says Dave has a woman visits him now and then. Anything wrong, Teague?"

"No...just routine and off the record." Teague arose. "Forget I asked, will you?"

Teague left the Colonial Club and headed back into town. Hunch still rode him. Harry Malon came from the East, so did Longcor—and a million others. Malon must have had help to get this far and that was the kind of job the crime syndicates handled. They'd turn the job over to someone like Zira at the border. That brought it back full circle, for Rita Ellis, Dave Longcor and Zira were just too

damned worried when Teague happened to walk in.

He pulled up before the station and went inside. The night sergeant told him that Malon was at the undertaker's and that Washington wanted plenty of hush-hush. Teague nodded and went to Records. He searched the cards and pulled one with a grunt of satisfaction.

David Longcor had three arrests for drunkenness. He had come to town about eight months ago and had had no visible means of support. But he had kept his nose clean recently, at least during the month he had worked at the Colonial Club. Dallas reported drunken arrests, so did St. Louis and Chicago. A drifter, Teague thought, an unknown who might do a job for Zira without anyone being the wiser. He rubbed his hand along his jaw, considering the card.

He had little time to work before the FBI took over—and little to work on. He replaced the card and walked out to the street and climbed into his car with the feeling of a gambler placing his last chip on a bobtailed straight.

HE DROVE westward, turning into a series of short, dirt streets not far from the fence that marked the border. A bit of Mexico had trickled through the wire. The district was dark and squalid, a catch-all for the drifters, the bums with a few last coins in their pockets, a place where a person could hang onto the shreds of decency before he took the final plunge into the flophouses and the jungles of the railroad track.

Teague found the dingy court of adobe huts. A scrawny cat eyed him malevolently as he moved down the row of dark hovels and found Longcor's place. He tried the door; it was locked. Teague hesitated. He could get in trouble about this, not having a warrant. But the lock was old fashioned and a standard skeleton key would give him admission. He cast a hasty glance down the silent alley and, in another moment, he stood within, softly closing the door behind him. He waited, feeling for a presence in the darkness. He finally fumbled in his pocket, found a book of matches and struck one.

He immediately found the string hanging from the single light in the ceiling. The place looked doubly dismal under the glare of the light. There

was a single bed, the gray blanket smooth, the pillow placed neatly. A faded, worn rug covered the floor. A plain table, a chair beside it, completed the furnishings.

Teague noticed the pencil drawings thumbtacked to the bare walls. They were sketches of the town both above and below the border and they breathed the life of the place and its people. They struck a completely false note, something like a pulpit standing in the corner of a gambling casino. He crossed the room, drawn by a pencil portrait of Rita Ellis—it could be no one else.

Yet this face, though it retained the lines about the mouth, the hard-won wisdom of the weary eyes, still gave the woman an inner beauty and glow, a depth that Teague had not noticed. He saw "Longcor" scrawled in a lower corner.

Artist, he thought. His glance circled the bare room and rested on a narrow closet door. He cocked his ear toward the alley and listened. Apparently no one was bothering to investigate the lights. Satisfied, Teague crossed to the closet and opened it.

A few bits of clothing hung neatly on wire hangers. A paper suitcase reposed on the single shelf. The floor of the closet held two pairs of badly worn shoes, an artist's portfolio. Teague's eyes moved swiftly, searching for something that might confirm his hunch. Apparently, it wasn't there.

His attention returned to the clothing—a cheap coat, wrinkled, a pair of trousers to match, another pair like those that Longcor wore at the Colonial Club. Teague idly moved the dark trousers and the light momentarily touched a stain. He hastily lifted the pants off the rod. The stain was irregular, caked, extending along one leg and across the front. The trousers had been folded so that the mark did not show unless they were moved.

TEAGUE was too familiar with that kind of stain. It was blood, human or animal. His face hardened as he studied the trousers, then tossed them on the bed. He pulled aside the portfolio, found nothing. He took the suitcase from the shelf, opened it. Empty. He was about to replace it when impulse made him pull

up the chair, stand up on it. His eyes swept the shelf and, in a far corner, he saw the knife. He took his handkerchief and carefully wrapped it about the blade.

He had enough, more than enough, and a triumphant, tight feeling increased his sense of having hit the jackpot. He pulled the light cord, closed and locked the door behind him. Only the scrawny cat watched him as he hurried to his car.

He left the trousers and knife at the office, waiting only long enough to have the knife dusted and fingerprints lifted. He waited impatiently as the prints were matched with the records. As he expected, Longcor's were on the knife along with others that might give a little more trouble. But Longcor's were enough for Teague.

He drove to the Club and entered the bar. He watched Longcor serve a table, something tired and strained in the man's face. Teague then glanced meaningfully at the deputy before signalling Longcor. The man started, caught himself, and approached with the obsequious stride of his profession.

Teague closely watched the man's eyes as he said, "I think you'd better come along with us."

"Why, sir?" Longcor asked.

"A man was knifed and taken up into the hills. I just came from your place. Want to guess what I found?"

Longcor moistened his lips and his washed eyes glanced at the alert deputy beyond Teague. His gaze came back to Teague.

"What made you suspicious of me?" he asked.

Teague blinked in surprise. Longcor acted as though he had expected this all along and there was no reason to resist arrest. "If you must know," he said, "I saw you at Zira's place. You were too damned afraid of a policeman."

"I see," Longcor said slowly. "Anyone at Zira's would be under suspicion, then?"

"Something like that. Come along, we'll hear your story and check it out."

Longcor looked about the dining room as though he would never see it again. That was possible, Teague thought, and shifted impatiently.

Longcor sighed. "No need to look any further. I—I'm your man."

3.

IT WAS VERY late when Teague opened the door and stepped into the living room. The television screen was dark and a stand lamp threw a small circle of light over his favorite chair. Mary stirred and looked up from the davenport, where she had been sleeping.

"Hey, Doll!" he protested. "You should've been in bed long ago!"

She smiled, stifled a yawn. Teague kissed her before she could sit up and her arms folded about his neck, pulled him close.

"I'll always worry, Frank. Things can happen—beyond the Fence."

He placed his big fist against her jaw and pushed gently. Mary arose and disappeared into the kitchen as Teague sat down in the chair with a pleased sigh. She returned, bringing a sandwich, a glass of milk.

"We've got our killer," he said between bites. "It'll be wrapped up by tomorrow night."

"You found him?" Mary asked, incredulously. "So soon!"

"Luck," Teague said, "a hunch and a little footwork. But it'll keep these stripes right where they belong."

"I'm glad, Frank. No—trouble?"

"None at all. The guy just came along. Said he did it, and then gave a full story at the station. He's locked up now and I doubt if he'll get out again."

"It's wonderful!" Mary smiled. "I'm glad for you, darling."

The papers would have it by tomorrow, the full details. The FBI man would be here by now, but Sergeant Teague of the sheriff's force had handed the Federal boys their case, neatly wrapped up. He told Mary everything that had happened. Now that it was over, he felt like telling her.

"Hunch," he ended. "Something wrong about the way Longcor acted in that curio shop. Something wrong in the quick way the woman came to his defense. So—" He smiled. "It paid off."

Mary nodded and then frowned. "You wouldn't believe a broken-down waiter would do a thing like that."

"But he did. The main points of his story hang together, as we know the facts

so far. Malon was trying to slip out of the country with some important secrets our Iron Curtain pals would like to know. He got this far and, I figure, was trying to think up some way of getting over the Fence. Maybe he tried to make some deal with Longcor. Anyhow they met and Longcor says they hit the bottle heavy."

Teague arose in his pleased excitement and paced. Mary watched him, listening. "Longcor says this Malon was a pretty mean boy—quarrelsome, insulting. I figure Longcor's no gentle blossom himself. A lush like that can get nasty when the whiskey's high in his brain. Anyhow, Longcor said Malon had a knife. He got nastier and nastier, and then Longcor's temper broke—at least, he vaguely remembers a hell of a quarrel. Longcor claims Malon tried to knife him, but he managed to get the knife away. Then Malon sailed into him with a chair, trying to brain him. Longcor stabbed in self defense."

Mary looked blank. "But—this happened in town. You found the body in the hills."

Teague sat down beside Mary. "Longcor was scared stiff after it was over. He has a record and he knew the police wouldn't believe the self defense line. It was late and dark and he had to take a chance. He loaded Malon in his old crate and drove up to the hills."

Mary's frown deepened. "But the body was found—"

"A long way from the road." Teague nodded. "Longcor dragged him up the canyon. Said it took him a hell of a time and he just barely had strength to do it. Then Longcor drove off, took a narrow side road. He straightened up his room. He was worn out and he decided he was safe enough to let the trousers and knife go until after work tonight."

Mary nodded. "You beat him to it."

"I beat him to it," Teague agreed. He frowned. "He might've got away with it, Mary. The Federal boys expected Malon to be in Canada, not down here. If that kid hadn't been hunting rabbits and I hadn't happened to take a look at Zira's shop—well, it was luck all the way around."

"But such fantastic luck," Mary said. "It's just not quite real, Frank."

He made an annoyed sound. "Doll, you can't figure these things sometimes—"

"I know. But this—it came

just too pat." She turned to face him. "You've checked out every little bit of his story?"

"So far," Teague said. "They'll work out the rest of it by tomorrow. It'll hold water. You can tell it from what Longcor has already said. We've got evidence and we have his confession. What else do we need?"

She saw that he was irritated. She smiled as she arose. "Nothing more, darling," she said. "It's police business anyhow."

WITHIN twenty minutes, Teague lay beside his wife in the dark bedroom. Her breathing was already deep and even in sleep, but he felt as though she still questioned his run of luck.

Teague eased out of bed, groped for cigarettes on the night stand and tiptoed out. He groped his way to the living room and sat down in the big chair, lit the cigarette.

"How much luck can you have?" he asked himself, paraphrasing Mary's doubt. But this was exactly what he had prayed for. He had only to take the evidence, the confession and the case was made, the credit his. The Gods of men who wear the badge had dumped it right in his lap. No frayed ends, no loose strings, airtight; evidence, confession, motive, method and opportunity all neatly arranged.

What else, Frank Teague? Nothing—except that David Longcor mixed himself up with a sheep being led to the slaughter in Frank Teague's tired mind, except that Mary's voice held a tone he didn't quite like.

Let it ride, Teague. His mind drifted. Just let it go routine and you'll be all right. Just let it ride. You'll be a fair haired boy—even the Feds say nice things in their matter-of-fact way.

4.

IF MARY hadn't asked Teague to pick up a grocery item before he went to the office, he wouldn't have met Bowen of the Immigration Service and exchanged a bit of idle talk. Bowen had dropped in for cigarettes just as Teague came through the check stands. He was obviously very weary.

"Been up for two full nights now," he said. He looked enviously at Teague's natty sheriff's uniform. "You local boys are lucky you don't have road block duty."

"Two nights?" Teague asked in mild surprise.

"And all for nothing. Oh, we had a flurry of action night before last. A car was coming south and swung around the curve on us. I still don't get why anyone heading *out* of the country would be getting in an uproar about our roadblocks."

"Exactly what happened?" Teague asked.

"We just had relief and were swinging our car around, when this one comes and slams to a halt, tires screaming like a cougar. Damned if three men didn't scram the hell out of the car and head for the cactus. We yelled for 'em to stop. All we got was some wild shots for an answer."

"You got 'em?"

"Skipped," Bowen said. "We alerted the Gate and then fanned out. They sent another car up the highway. Damned if they didn't get a glimpse of the same three, but they faded into the hills again. Last we saw of 'em."

"Narcotics?"

"Going the *other* way?" Bowen asked scathingly. He hid a yawn. "You boys run ir to any trouble that night?"

"Quiet," Teague said, and Bowen shrugged and left.

Teague put the bag of groceries in the back seat, slid under the wheel and turned the starter key. The motor caught smoothly, but Teague abruptly switched it off. Wait a minute! Bowen had his brush the same night Malon was knifed. But *that* had happened in town, at Longcor's place.

Teague's eyes narrowed. Had it? Malon would have come from the north and he would travel by night. A man like him would easily panic, whipping around a curve and onto a road block. He would naturally believe it was for him. A man from Cleveland would not immediately think of wetbacks, or narcotics.

"It's just too pat." He could hear Mary's voice. Open and shut—method, motive, timing, all pointing right at David Longcor. Teague grimaced and drove thoughtfully to the sheriff's office. He learned from the man at the desk that the coroner reported Malon was killed around eleven the night before, give or take an hour, and that the Federals had arrived and identified him. The murder was strictly a local affair. But they would still like to know how Malon got this far.

"They think a crime syndi-

cate shipped him down and it might have connections below the Fence," the desk man said. "They'd like to break that little party up, so they're leaving a man."

Teague started toward his office, but Webb came out and his face lighted when he saw Teague. "Frank! Come in!"

THE MAN in the office with Webb was quietly dressed, smooth of face and had a friendly smile. He looked more like a bond salesman than a G-man.

"You've done a fine job, Teague," he said.

"Quick police work, Ainslee," Webb said complacently. "I have a good staff here."

Ainslee nodded and came right to the point. "Sergeant, Malon didn't come down here alone. We are fairly sure he wouldn't be alone if he'd crossed the Border. Someone would be waiting for him. Who?"

Teague sat down at Webb's gesture. "You asking for guesses?"

"You're going to mention Zira," Ainslee said.

"Luis Zira," Teague agreed. "But no one has ever pinned anything directly on him. Moreles of the Rurales would give his badge and pay to do it—but, no dice."

"Nothing in this case points to him?"

Teague hesitated. He could actually deny it so far as the facts went and the case would end right here... Teague's triumph. But he couldn't. Maybe it was Mary or maybe it was his own annoying instinct for exactness. He shrugged.

"Longcor, the guy who knifed Malon—I first saw him talking with a woman in Zira's curio shop beyond the Fence."

Ainslee looked closely at Teague. "How about a visit—below the border?"

"I'll have to get out of uniform," Teague grinned at Ainslee. "You won't be worth much down there."

Ainslee laughed. "It won't be the first time."

They first talked to Captain Moreles, who filled Ainslee in on Zira, admitting that the greater part of what he said was mere suspicion.

Teague took Ainslee to the curio shop. Rita Ellis was not there, but a black haired girl, with flashing eyes and hips that swung provocatively, answered their questions. Senorita Ellis did not come to work until late afternoon. She lived on the American side. No, the

patron seldom appeared. Senorita Ellis conducted all the business.

Teague gave Ainslee a tour of the garish Mexican night spots and pointed out a few of Zira's helpmates. He bought drinks at the San Marcos and then they drove back through the gates. Teague drove Ainslee to his motel.

"A nice evening," Ainslee said. "And I have a better understanding of your Luis Zira. He operates like the boys back east."

"Better." Teague said. "He keeps his nose clean so far as we—or the Rurales—can tell."

Ainslee shrugged, still leaning on the car door. "Sooner or later...but you know the old waiting game. A cop gets used to it. Good night, Teague. Oh, and a good job on that quick wrap-up."

Teague nodded, pleased. He drove to the station to check any last minute developments. The desk man indicated the cell row. "Our knifer has a visitor, a woman. Strictly from hunger, this one. But maybe for a jasper as old as he is—"

Teague strode to the barred door that gave access to the cells and looked in on the deputy who kept watch. He asked his question in a whisper and the man nodded.

"Just came in, Sergeant. They're talking like he was already in the gas chamber. Yeah, Rita Ellis."

Teague walked back to his office. He left the door open and sat down behind his desk at such an angle that he could watch the main room and see anyone who came out of the cell row.

IT WAS BUT a matter of minutes before Rita Ellis crossed the main room. She walked erect, her chin set and lips compressed, but it would be a major triumph if she reached the door without breaking into tears.

Teague strode to the main room and to a young deputy on a bench against the far wall. Teague nodded toward the street. "Tail that woman who just went out. Can you do it without her seeing you?"

"I think so, sir."

"You'd better," Teague snapped. "If she goes through the gate, call Moreles and have his boys pick up the tail. Tell him I'll phone to confirm. Then call me."

"Yes, sir," the deputy said and left.

Teague felt suddenly at a

loose end. He should go home and forget this whole business that was already neatly wrapped up. The cell guard moved and Teague caught the faint sound. He signalled the man to unlock the barred corridor door.

Longcor sat on his bunk and looked up when Teague stepped in.

"What more can I tell you, Sergeant?"

Teague spoke on sudden impulse. "Just why in hell you want to die?"

Longcor's face was gray and lined with weariness, a lifetime of disappointment, of wandering, of seeing things that did nothing for any man. Yet there was something else. Teague couldn't place it, nor could he let it go. Where had he seen just that expression before? It lurked just behind Longcor's eyes, in the faint uplift of the corners of the weary mouth. Teague spoke brusquely, annoyed that this baffled him.

"What's your line, Longcor?'

"Waiter. You know that."

"In this town, yes. But before?"

"Bum, mostly," Longcor said, without rancor.

Teague stubbornly shook his head. "A bum doesn't settle down and try to make a home." He saw Longcor's interlaced fingers tighten. "What were you before you became a bum?"

Longcor studied his hands, the fingers long and tapering. "That was another life ago." His head was lowered but Teague caught the lift of the corner of his mouth in a sardonic smile. "I might have been called an artist."

It tied in with the sketches. Teague tried in some instinctive way to sense the man under the beaten form on the bunk before him. Failing, he decided it was best to stick to routine questions rather than psychic probings.

He probed Longcor's story, throwing out swift questions. But Longcor stuck with his story, only becoming vague on certain facts, certain elements of timing. He was evasive now as to how Malon had happened to be in town, when he arrived, where they met. He slightly changed his description of the fatal fight, refused to go into detail. But still, there was enough to send him to the gas chamber. A prosecuting attorney could do it without raising a sweat.

Teague finally returned to

his office. He ought to go home, but instead he sat at his desk and scowled at the wall map. Then, with a grunt of self derision, he scooped up the phone and called Mary. He'd be late again.

"Is it because of that man who confessed, Frank?"

"Yeah...him. His story still holds up but—"

"I'm glad you're checking further, Frank. It...would be horrible if you got credit...I'll wait for you."

He knew what she meant. He pushed the phone away. "We're both damn' fools," he growled. "We can't let sleeping dogs alone." He smiled ruefully at the silent phone. "But I'm not holding it against you, Doll."

HE DROVE to the noxious section along the Fence. Longcor's court seemed more littered and dirty than before. Two men leaned against an adobe wall, their cigarettes glowing and fading. Only their eyes, suspicious and fearful, moved as Teague walked up to them and asked for the landlady. They gave swift reply, relieved that he had no business with them. But even so, Teague had hardly taken ten strides toward the shack at the end of the row when the two men scuttled away.

The landlady had a brown, wrinkled, almost toothless face; her gray-streaked hair looked as if it had not been washed in years or combed in days. She was fearful and then relieved when she discovered his business did not directly concern her. She led him into an odorous box of a room and he sat gingerly on a broken couch as he questioned her about David Longcor.

"A good renter, that one," she said. "You are the first of the police who has asked about him. It is not so of the others."

"You should choose more carefully, *mamacita,*" Teague said.

"Ay-ee! *You* have a full belly! But this Senor Longcor was at first like the others, always drunk. He did not make noise or fight, you understand, but he was drunk—for days at a time. Then he meets this woman and now for months I have not seen him drink. He works every night, steady, and sometimes in the afternoon he goes out with papers and pencils, maybe paint. Sometimes he shows me what he has done. It is beautiful, Senor!"

Teague nodded. "Who is the woman?"

"He calls her Rita. That is all I know. She is not young, Senor. That one has seen the bad things. She has come here several times and the two of them are. . . *simpatico.*"

Rita Ellis, Teague thought, important to Dave Longcor. He turned the old woman's talk to the night of the murder with a casual question.

"Night before last?" she asked. "No, he was not drunk. He came home from work, late as always. My old bones ache and so I am up and he stopped to talk to me."

The old woman waved a clawlike hand toward the wide passage between the decrepit buildings. "We are out there, sitting in chairs, smoking cigarettes and talking. Then his woman comes, in a hurry and frightened."

"Rita!" Teague exclaimed.

"That one. Senor Longcor is surprised and, at first he, too, thinks she is drunk. Her hair is down, you understand, and her dress is thrown on. She also shakes a little, I see that. Senor Longcor jump up and take her a few feet away. I cannot hear the words, but only the sound. You savvy, Senor? It is very important what he is saying. Then he leaves with her, but he first tell me maybe he be gone a long time."

"He was?"

"Late in the morning, Senor, I see him come in. He looks very tired."

"What time did he leave with the girl?"

The crone studied the question, beady eyes half veiled. "That is hard to say, Senor. The place where he works closes at one and it is more than an hour before he comes home. I think maybe it was three when Rita comes. They leave soon after."

"And he returned?"

"Maybe around ten in the morning. *Si,* ten it was, for my daughter came at eleven that day."

"He was not drunk when he left?"

"Senor, he was not drunk. There was no smell of it upon him. He did not drink with me, though, *por dios,* I could have used the burn of it to take the ache from my bones."

Teague questioned her again about the timing and she stuck to her story with the quiet surety of truth. Finally, he thanked her and left the shack.

TEAGUE headed back toward the station, his mind busy with the information he'd

just picked up. The old woman's story knocked the timing of the crime, if Longcor had done the killings, completely out. Malon was dead before Rita had come for Longcor, if the coroner's statement was right. Longcor claimed he had been drinking. The old woman said that he had not.

What had worried or frightened Rita Ellis that she should seek Longcor's help in the long, dead hours of the early morning? Teague's fingers drummed on the steering wheel and his eyes suddenly widened. Malon was heading for Mexico under the protection of some syndicate mob if Ainslee was right. He was to be handed over to another mob, that operated south of the Fence. Who else but Zira?

Zira was Rita Ellis' boss and she had obviously been in bad trouble when she called for Longcor. Maybe Longcor was taking a rap to protect the woman. Suddenly Teague realized where he had seen Longcor's strange expression. It belonged to the martyrs, the sacrificed, those who gave the last full measure for some cause or some person.

He hurried to the station, eager to get a report on Rita Ellis. Beyond doubt now, Mary was right—and his own instinctive feeling had not betrayed him either. This was not open and shut—but involved.

TEAGUE strode into the main room and sharply asked if the deputy had reported. The desk officer shook his head and Teague's square face dropped. He walked quickly to the cell block.

Longcor was stretched out on his bunk and he only opened his eyes to look patiently at Teague when he entered. He made no attempt to get up.

"What has Rita Ellis to do with this?" Teague's harsh voice demanded.

Longcor's body grew rigid and his face slowly congealed into harsh, stubborn lines. It was a long moment before he answered.

"Nothing. I just know her, that's all."

"Just know her," Teague repeated. "Well enough to protect her all you can? You'd better talk a lot more than you have."

"Leave her out of this." Longcor swung his feet out of the bunk. "I just know her, that's all."

"Where did you meet her? When?"

"Maybe six months ago. I happened to go through the Fence and I had a drink in a joint down there. I met her then." Longcor's eyes grew soft. "I needed to meet her. She's been good for me, though why she should waste time on a whiskey-soaked has-been I don't know. She's too damn' good for someone—" He broke off and glared at Teague. "Besides, you want a murderer. You got one. What else is there?"

"Where was she the night Malon was killed?"

"Home! She never left the place. Look, the trouble was between Malon and me. What kind of reefer dream you having?"

"You said you knifed Malon at your place," Teague said. "Sure it wasn't somewhere else?"

Longcor looked definitely frightened, and not for himself. "At my place, copper. I took him up in the hills. You can't prove anything different. You got my confession. Whyn't you just take it from there!"

"Afraid I won't?"

"Look, copper, why do you want to drag Rita in? You can't pin anything on her. Stop trying."

Teague eyed him. He pictured Mary and Jerry and wondered what he would do if something like this happened to them. If Mary was in a jam that might send her to the gas chamber, or to a life behind bars, what wouldn't he do!

"This Rita," Teague said gently, "what does she mean to you?"

Longcor started to reply, but caught himself, seemed to realize that his questioner wore a uniform and a badge. The dull curtain fell over his eyes and face again. He turned away.

"Just a woman...if you must know. Just someone to take care of the cold nights."

Teague stood motionless for a moment and then unlocked the cell door and stepped out into the corridor. Longcor did not turn and Teague looked compassionately on the thin back, the rounded shoulders.

He sat behind his desk and tried to think things through, put the small but vital missing pieces into some sort of coherent story. Longcor had not been drunk, according to the landlady. He had not expected Rita, who came to him frightened and worried and after

Malon had been killed. There was the chance, of course, that Longcor had met Malon *before* he came home. If that was true and he was not drunk as he claimed, then the crime must have deeper motives.

ON THE WAY out, Teague checked with the desk again. The young deputy had still not called in. Teague drove out to the Colonial Club. He had a drink and then a talk with the manager. When he came out, he knew that Longcor had lied on two counts. He had not been drinking that night. The manager had not recognized Malon's picture and was sure he had not been at the Colonial Club. Longcor could not possibly have left at the time the manager last saw him, have met Malon somewhere, got drunk enough to get into a knife brawl and have appeared cold sober again at his home. Rita Ellis certainly had something to do with this.

Teague returned to the station and there was still no call. He glanced at Webb's empty office and wondered what the lieutenant would say when Teague reported they no longer had an open and shut case, or a sergeant who was a genius. He made a wry face and went into his own office.

Any way you looked at it, they had the wrong man in jail. He had a record. But what is drunk and disorderly or vagrancy against the crime to which he had so readily confessed?

What had Rita Ellis done to him? Maybe she had started pulling him back up into the land of the living and useful. Maybe she was the first person who had taken an interest in Longcor other than to cadge drinks of cheap whiskey or to cajole him into some cheap room and musty bed for a buck or two. Teague rubbed his hand along his jaw. Was this enough for the man to willingly repay with his own life? What about the woman? Was she saving her own skin? If so, it made her a hell of a person.

His phone rang and Teague started. He picked it up. It was the young deputy. "Rita Ellis just went through the gate, Sergeant."

"Where has she been?" Teague snapped.

"First she went to her apartment." The deputy gave the address and Teague jotted it down. "She was there so long I figured she wouldn't come

out. But she finally did. Looked like she'd been crying."

"You must've been close. Did she see you?"

"She walked right by the car, Sergeant. But she didn't notice it, or me. She went up town and called on Blake Morris, the lawyer."

"That shyster!" Teague exclaimed in disgust.

"Yeah, well she was there for a long time. It was then I noticed the other three."

"What three?"

"Zira and a couple of his boys. They must've been waiting near the gate for her to show up. Anyhow, they spotted her. She came out and headed directly for the gate, the three following her. That's it, Sergeant. I followed her to the border and I can't go further."

"Good," Teague said. "Come back to the station."

The deputy hung up. The damned thing kept turning back to Zira. He phoned Captain Moreles' home. The man's voice was sleepy. Teague apologized and told him about Rita Ellis.

"So she came back into my town," Moreles said patiently. "She has the right, eh?"

"Yeah, she has the right. But how come Zira takes such an interest? Can you boys pick her up on any kind of an excuse? Say she needs better clearance at the border, or anything that sounds reasonable enough to get her back this side of the gate long enough for me to grab her."

Moreles was fully awake now. "*Amigo,* you want her that bad?"

"That bad. She's tied up with the Malon killing somehow, and Zira wants to grab her. Can you beat him to it? Maybe this is what both of us need to get our elusive friend."

Moreles chuckled grimly. "For that I would bring the devil to the gate and let you grab the end of his tail."

"Good! I'll send a car. But don't waste time, *amigo.* Zira won't if he's tied up in this."

Moreles' phone clicked and Teague walked to the main room. A talk to the dispatcher sent orders out on the radio for a sheriff's car to be at the Mexican entry gate in a matter of minutes and to stay there until the Rurales escorted one Rita Ellis over the line. She would then be brought to the station.

TEAGUE hurried to his own car. Rita did not live very

far from David Longcor and in a district that was only a shade better. He drove there without delay. The building was long and low, cheaply built. Three apartments looked out on a yard that once had been green, but now possessed only occasional tufts of half dead grass, the big bare spots littered with scraps of paper and ancient cigarette butts.

Rita's was the back apartment and Teague had to walk by the other two to reach it. A curious face stared at him from a window. And a small, scrawny man in a dirty white shirt shuffled forward, squinted eyes filled with suspicion and alarm.

"She ain't home, sheriff," he said.

Teague nodded. "I know. You the owner?"

"Manager."

Teague held out his hand. "Give me the key."

"You got a right, sheriff?"

"Want to argue about it?" Teague demanded.

The man shook his head, shuffled off and returned with the key. He unlocked the door and started inside, but Teague's broad hand stopped him and then the door closed in his face.

Teague saw first a pastel crayon drawing of Rita hanging on the wall over the bed. He did not have to look at the signature to know that it had been done by Longcor. On another wall, between two narrow windows, hung a charcoal drawing of the hills about the town.

Teague gave them but a glance and the whole room took hardly more than that. It was a touch better than Longcor's, no more.

A door opened on a second room and Teague saw an oil cooking stove, a spotless metal table, two severely straight chairs, one with a wired leg. There were two other doors, both closed, and Teague found that one led to the bathroom.

The other gave access to a narrow closet. Teague looked over the few dresses, cheap cotton things for the most part. One puzzled him. Someone had taken the V of the collar and ripped the fabric down to the waistline, and the skirt had jagged rents. Teague looked at the others. If it had not been for the ripped fabric, this was the best dress that Rita had.

There was nothing else. He turned to the dresser and started through the drawers, finding cheap earrings, a cardboard box of powder, bobby

pins neatly arranged in a little plastic box. In the second drawer Teague found cheap but neatly arranged underthings, bras, panties, slips. Everything was so neatly arranged that he was surprised to find a pair of panties and a bra wadded into the rear of the drawer, carefully placed under all the rest.

Like the dress in the closet, these garments had been needlessly ripped and torn. Teague considered them, not liking this f a l s e note. . . everything so clean and neat and yet to find a ripped dress, these torn and discarded underthings. He finally folded them, closed the drawer, then went to the closet and took down the torn dress. He carried the dress and the underthings out to his car, paying no attention to the hard stare of the manager.

TEAGUE closed the car door and turned back to the building and the manager who still stood watching him.

"What kind of trouble she been in?" the man asked.

"Does it have to be trouble?" Teague asked.

"Her—or that man she runs around with."

"You don't like 'em?"

"She pays the rent regular and lives quiet enough, I guess. Except the other night—first time I seen her so drunk she had to be carried in."

"What night?"

"Night before last. It was after eleven, I guess. Big car drove up and two men get out. Rita Ellis was so drunk she hung between 'em as they walked her back there. They had to unlock the door for her."

Teague kept his voice casual. "One of them was her boy friend?"

"No! She was making a fool out of him that night." The man's squint eyes glittered maliciously. "She works in a joint below the Fence, you know. I guess she spent an evening with those two Mexicans down there and ended it up here."

"Mexicans?"

"Two of 'em," the man nodded, "and they drove a big black car. I saw it out there—don't know what kind, but it was big. I waited to see them leave, but finally gave up and went to bed. She's no better than I thought her."

Teague considered this, and thought of the torn garments in his car. It didn't make a pretty picture. But if the manager's suspicions were correct,

why had she run to Longcor in such fright later—and alone?

"Let's take another look at her apartment," Teague said and the manager followed him, thin lips quirked in an anticipation that annoyed Teague. "Anything missing?"

The man looked around at the bare floor. "Hey! the rug! I furnish this place, officer, and there was a rug here."

That was all the help he could give. Teague dismissed him and sat on the edge of the bed to study the room again. He thought of the big car and the two Mexicans, Rita limp drunk between them. Eleven o'clock, he mused. He arose and left, closing the door behind him. A man emerged from the second apartment, surprised to see a sheriff in his neighbor's doorway. He was a young man with a clear olive skin and alert eyes. He had no fear of the uniform.

"Hey, something wrong with Rita!"

"Just routine, *amigo*. Seen her lately?"

"Sure, she was around most of the day. Looked worried."

"How about night before last?"

The man looked blank. "Naw, I didn't see her. Come home around one that night—my sister was married beyond the Fence." He grinned reminiscently. "It was a hell of a big party. Saw her light on, but the blinds were pulled. Didn't see Rita."

"Around one? See a big black car out there at the curb?"

"Nothing like that. No, there wasn't no car...big, black one I'd remember, 'cause most of the heaps around this part are just piles of junk."

THERE WAS nothing more the man could add and Teague thanked him and returned to the car. He headed down the hill to the main section of town. Now and then he had glimpses of the high, stout fence and he wondered if Moreles had managed to pick up Rita Ellis in that jumble of buildings, houses and shacks that formed the much larger Mexican city.

He tried to fit what he had learned into the picture. Sometime before midnight two Mexicans had brought Rita Ellis home, and they drove a big, black car. That seemed to indicate Zira. She had been helped into her apartment and the two men had remained—two hours at the most, between

the time the manager had seen them and her neighbor had returned. There was a torn dress and ripped underthings on the seat beside Teague. When had that happened? Around three she had appeared at Longcor's place, frightened, and Longcor had hurried off with her, not to return until late the next morning. If Rita had been fearful of her guests and had run to Longcor for help, she had certainly taken her own sweet time about it.

Longcor? He confessed that he had knifed Malon in a drunken brawl. Teague was fairly certain that the man had not been drunk in nearly six months. He knew beyond doubt that Longcor was sober and talking to his landlady *after* Malon was knifed.

Teague's jaw set as he wheeled the car into the main street and glided to the curb before the station. It was high time for a showdown with David Longcor, for Teague had cracked the man's story wide open.

He had not killed Harry Malon. Then who had? Rita Ellis? Teague would bet his next month's pay that Longcor was trying to protect the woman. Longcor knew that she had done the killing, or at least strongly believed it. So did Teague.

And yet there was a faint nagging of doubt. Don't make this another open-shut deal, he warned himself.

6.

TEAGUE first went to his office and put the bundle of clothing in the lower drawer of his desk. He asked if there had been any calls from Moreles, or any report from the car waiting at the gate. Nothing. Teague nodded.

"If a man was in a hell of a hurry to get out of the country and was this close, what would make him stop and drink?"

The deputy looked blank. "Maybe he was tired. Maybe it was a woman. Hell, it don't make sense."

"No, it doesn't," Teague said grimly. He told the deputy to come with him to Longcor's cell. Longcor looked up in weary patience when they appeared, then sat upright, sensing something wrong.

"I've been to Rita's place," Teague said abruptly.

"Where's Rita?" Longcor asked, alarmed.

"Right now, in Mexico. But she won't be for long." Teague balled his fists on his hips.

"Now suppose you tell me the truth about Harry Malon."

"I have," Longcor answered.

"You've lied like a bastard, Longcor." Teague paid no attention to the deputy's surprised exclamation. "I found out what Rita was doing the night Malon was killed. I've found out where you were and what you were doing."

Longcor stared, his face strained and gray, only a shred of defiance in his blue eyes.

Teague shook his head as the man started to speak. "Make it the truth, Longcor," he said. "Rita didn't get rid of her torn clothes, like you told her. Malon was drunk and fighting, but it wasn't you that knifed him. Rita did."

Open anguish was in Longcor's face now. "No...she didn't do it."

"Neither did you. We're tearing up that phony confession." Teague's voice grew gentle and understanding. "Hell, you've been trying to protect her. It's no good. Better tell us what you know. Rita Ellis did it, didn't she?"

"No." He shook his head and looked up, pleading. "You got to believe that!"

"Make us," Teague said.

"I'd come home from work and was talking to my landlady before I went to bed. Rita came, scared to death. She told me she was in a hell of a jam and she needed my help."

He paused and Teague waited. Longcor lifted his shoulders in a hopeless gesture. "I went with Rita and there was a dead man laying between the bed and the wall. He'd been knifed and the damned thing was still sticking in his back. Rita didn't know how he got there. She swore she never saw him before until she woke up and found him laying right there."

"Woke up?" Teague asked.

Longcor held his hands out, palms upward. "There's a lot about this I don't understand either. Rita told me Luis Zira came to the curio shop, the first time she's seen him in a couple of months. He's real nice this time, real, real nice. He says Rita's been working too hard and it's time he shows her he appreciates it."

"Zira said that!" Teague exclaimed.

"He took her to one of his places, a quiet bar right near the San Marcos. He buys her a drink. She says she don't want any, but Zira says it's on him and the house and it's time she relaxed. They have a drink and then a couple more, Zira forcing Rita, making it so that

she'd feel like a heel if she wouldn't accept his kindness.

"They hit her hard. She's not used to much drinking since—we started seeing each other. Anyhow. she woke up laying on her bed in her room. She don't know how she got there, who brought her. She was—stark naked, her stuff laying around, ripped off her.

LONGOR'S eyes closed tightly and he took a deep breath. He continued, his voice at a dead level. "She still doesn't know what could've happened. The place was torn up and then she finds this guy laying between the bed and the wall, the knife in him, like he'd been stabbed on the bed and fell down there."

"Had he?" Teague asked.

"Mister. there was no blood anywhere, except some dried stuff on his shirt below where the knife was. Rita got scared. She grabbed another dress and run over to my place."

"You went back with her?"

Longcor poised at this final point, where he could continue his hopeless lie or tell the truth. His shoulders slumped.

"I went back with her. I—don't believe she had anything to do with this Malon. She's not that kind. But I could see the police would never believe her story. I told her to straighten things up. I got my car and rolled a rug around Malon and loaded him into it. The whole place was dark and it was so late no one saw me. I drove out of town, up to the hills. I didn't think I'd ever get him back in that canyon. A dead man weighs heavy and I'm not young and strong. But I didn't want any tie-in between Malon and Rita."

Teague glanced at the deputy. Get a steno and we'll take down his story."

The deputy left. Longcor sat dejectedly, head bowed, arms hanging limp from his knees, fingers interlaced. Teague's face softened.

"I think this time you're telling the truth, *amigo*. You wanted to take the rap for her, and it could have meant your life. Why did you do it?"

Longcor shook his head without looking up. "Rita asked me that. She wouldn't listen to me at first, said she'd tell the whole story flat out. I was arguing with her about it when you came into the curio shop. You scared us both, and I guess that's what first tipped you off."

"Something like that," Teague agreed.

"After you brought me here, I had an even harder time getting Rita to keep quiet. But I made her promise. She says she's getting a lawyer." He added after a second, "She can't afford it."

"But you," Teague insisted. "Why?"

Longcor looked up. "What am I, mister? I was a good artist once, and maybe a fair kind of man. But no more. I'm a drunken, no good bum just hanging on. Rita Ellis is the first fine thing that's come into my life in twenty years. She's tried to pump new hope and belief into me. I love her."

"You've told her?"

"*Me* tell her! Mister, what good would it do Rita to know I'm in love with her? I'd only hurt her more and more if we were married—and maybe bring her to my level. That's no good. It's better this way. The—gas chamber would just rid the world of a bit of junk. Rita'd be better off, and maybe I could help her by doing it. She's worth it." Longcor looked up. "You understand, don't you?"

Teague abruptly turned and walked out. The corridor looked a little misty and his chest was tight. He went into his office and called Moreles.

THERE WAS no answer, and his office said the captain was out and would be back perhaps within the hour. Scouring the town for Rita, Teague thought as he cradled the instrument. He wished he could go down there and join the search, but Rita Ellis was untouchable so long as she remained below the border.

He bit at his lip and then his eyes stubbornly lighted. He hurried to the main room, told the desk man he could be reached at home. He drove swiftly, swung into the drive and hurried into the house. He called greetings to Mary, heard her answer from the kitchen. He hurried upstairs to his bedroom and started removing his uniform. Mary came in, watched his hasty movements with a frown.

"Something wrong, darling?"

"I'm going below the Fence," he said, jerking on a sport shirt. He lifted his gray, civilian trousers from the closet. "You were right about this whole deal, Doll. Longcor didn't do any killing."

"I knew it," she exclaimed.

"Right now," Teague said, buckling his belt, "I'd charge the woman with it, but I have a hunch she's about as innocent as Longcor. Luis Zira's in this and this time he slipped. I'm going to see. Moreles is looking now and I can help a little."

He strapped on a shoulder harness, then slipped his revolver into the holster. He shrugged into a coat, turned to find Mary standing quite still in the doorway. Her eyes spoke of fear, but her chin was set and her smile was there, if a little uncertain.

"You really don't have to go down there, Frank," she said.

"There's a beat-up guy in a cell ready to take gas for a woman. Maybe neither one of them is worth a damn, looking at it one way. But he's doing the same thing for her that I'd do for you. So you see, Doll, I really do have to go down there."

Mary looked up at him, eyes wide. "Better hurry," she said. "And be careful."

Moreles had just returned to the Rurales station. He looked up in surprise when Teague came in. Then his face fell at the question in Teague's eyes.

"Not a trace of her. We've looked everywhere."

Teague rapidly outlined to Moreles what he had learned about the Malon killing and how close he was to tying it into Luis Zira. Moreles listened, dark eyes lighting. When Teague finished, he snapped his fingers.

"*Ole!* We've needed just one thing like this." His face fell. "But we cannot find her. Zira covers his tracks. It will take much time."

"And we've got little left," Teague said fretfully. He gave Moreles a swift, intense look. "I've really got no business down here, except to watch your boys work. But if I happened to be wandering around—"

Moreles shook his head. "How would you know where to look?"

Teague grinned. "The same way you know a hell of a lot about the American side, *amigo*. We've both questioned prisoners and suspects from the other side. Name any street in the District and I'll bet five pesos I can list the bars and houses on it."

Moreles looked faintly chagrined, then smiled. His palm slapped down on the desk. "Then why do we sit here! I'll go with you!"

Teague's gesture checked

him. "In that uniform?" he asked. "With a face that every shady character would recognize? Better let me go alone."

"But—"

Teague patted the slight bulge under his coat. "I can take care of myself—and your boys won't be far away if they're looking for Zira." His voice tightened. "We run out of time, *amigo*. Zira acts fast, from what I hear."

WITHIN ten minutes, Teague entered the garish district north and west of the American hotel. Moreles had given him a list of the places known to belong to Zira, but added that there might be a dozen others controlled by him through dummy owners.

A lone American male wandering the streets of any border town is the immediate prey of harpies of every kind, age and sex. Teague was importuned a dozen times to buy gum, watches, marijuana cigarettes, photographed depravity. Women openly invited him to buy what they, as women, had to offer and sharp faced men slithered up to him to suggest they could take him to mysterious places of ecstacy. Teague shook them off.

All the garish filth of the border towns seemed to be concentrated in this small area just south of the Fence. Death prowled the narrow streets and watched Teague in the bars. More than once Teague caught the calculating look of pinched face men, but there was something in the wide set of his shoulders, his harsh jaw, the self confidence with which he moved that warned them off. Only once did two men follow him out to the street Teague walked a few paces, suddenly whipped about, chin thrust forward, eyes cold, his hand lifting to his coat. The two instantly found interest elsewhere and it was the last Teague saw of them.

Time passed and, with it, he felt increasingly that he must find some trace of Rita. He started across a narrow side street when he was hailed in a low voice. Moreles looked at him from the shadow of a plain black car.

Teague's feeling of desperate futility broke through in his sharp tone. "Nursing me along?" he asked as he bent to the car door.

"Not at all," Moreles answered. He made a grimace. "I came to see if your luck was better than ours."

"No good," Teague said

with a sigh, and the irritation left him. He looked along the street that, for all the neon lights, looked secretive and ugly. "I'm going to prowl the alleys," he said abruptly.

Moreles started. "Es loco! A knife, a club, a garotte!"

"If Zira tries to slip Rita out of one of these places, he won't take her out the front way, or along the streets," Teague answered flatly. "Anyhow, a look-see in back won't do any harm. We're getting nowhere, as it is."

"Then I come along," Moreles said and started to open the door. Teague stopped him by leaning against it.

"Now who's the fool!" he said. "You watch the front and I'll scout the back. If I run into trouble, you'll know it. I'll use my gun."

Moreles looked up at him, eyes level. "It would make me very sad to send you back across the border in a box, *amigo*. A dark alley and a long knife are silent."

"Chance it." Teague considered the street again. "I'll work along this side to the next street, then south and back up this way along the rear of those buildings over there. You might have some of your boys around, just in case."

MORELES was reaching for the radio as Teague walked away. The rear of the buildings, so garish in front, were dark and forbidding along the alleyway. The narrow passage was noisome with filth and many times Teague heard the slight scurry of rats. Now and then he heard a burst of sound and once, from an upper window, he heard a woman's harsh voice scream angry obscenities.

He kept his hand close to his shoulder holster and he kept as alert for the soft sounds behind as for those ahead. The slight whisper of a sandal might be his only warning of attack.

He neared the far end of the block. Suddenly a long car started a slow turn off the street but, before the headlights could sweep across him, Teague darted into a narrow, stinking passageway between two buildings. The car moved forward and Teague pressed himself farther back in the shadows until it was gone. He carefully made his way to where he could peer down the alley and then froze.

The car had stopped not thirty feet away. A man stepped out, knocked on some unnoticed doorway. Instantly

light splashed out as the door opened and Teague saw the man who had knocked, had a glimpse of the driver and another man holding open the rear door of the car.

"Hurry!" The man in the light made a fierce gesture.

Three people appeared. Two men supported a woman between them. It was but a few steps to the car, but the woman suddenly tried to twist free of the hands that held her. Teague caught a brief glimpse of her face. Rita Ellis.

He levelled his gun and his voice echoed in the narrow alley. *"Alto! Policia!"*

The man who had knocked on the door whirled like a striking snake and Teague caught the glint of the gun that suddenly appeared in his hand. Teague fired and the man was knocked around and down by the impact of the slug. Flame leapt from the rear of the car as a man fired through the open window and the bullet slapped into the adobe wall beside Teague. The men with Rita half turned, trying to rush her back inside the building, but Teague's second shot cut a long splinter from the door and they wheeled around.

They released Rita, intent on killing Teague. Their guns slammed like artillery. Teague had dropped flat and the bullets whipped over him. Somewhere above the pandemonium he heard a scream and a shrill blast of a whistle. Light suddenly swept over the car from somewhere behind Teague and he knew another car had wheeled into the alley.

His first thought: he had been caught in a deadly trap between the two lines of fire. In the new headlights he could see the sleek, long auto that had come for Rita. One of the men made a dive for the open door, slammed it after him. The driver clashed gears and the machine jumped forward, rocked to a halt as the second car wheeled forward, effectively blocking escape.

The car behind Teague swept by him, slammed to a halt. Men in uniform erupted from it and Teague, cursing happily, came to his feet.

"Teague! Teague!" a voice called.

"Here!" Teague answered and started to race by the Rurales' car. Moreles jumped out, blocking him.

"No bother, *amigo*. My men will handle it."

"Rita!" Teague snapped. "She's around here—close."

They found her, crouched in the shadows behind a broken barrel, dazed and trembling. Teague led her to the car.

Teague then jerked his thumb toward the building. "Zira must be in there. Let's get him."

Moreles' white teeth flashed in a wide smile. "*Amigo,* will you wait with the lady? You forget, you're *south* of the Fence."

The fight in the alley over, Moreles hastened forward and gave swift orders. The prisoners were taken back to the far automobile and the Rurales, with the exception of one guard left behind, moved on the silent building with the precision of an army patrol.

RITA SAT beside Teague in the back seat, trembling, tears brimming her eyes. Teague watched her and the alley and listened to new sounds from within the building, shouts of alarm, a crash of furniture, two muffled shots placed far apart. The alley itself was silent, brilliant with the glow of lights from the police cars. Suddenly Rita Ellis took a deep, shuddering breath and Teague's attention swung to her. She looked at him with a strange mixture of gratitude and fear.

"Don't worry any more about them," Teague said.

"They were going to...take me up in the hills."

"Because of Harry Malon?" Teague asked.

She shivered and nodded. "I ...just don't know what happened. Dave said—" She broke off sharply.

"He told you to let him handle it," Teague nodded. "I know. Only he's not a good liar. But he tried—for you."

They said nothing more, even after Moreles returned with a satisfied grin and his men had half a dozen prisoners, among them Luis Zira who glared at Teague with murderous intent.

Moreles chuckled as he drove to the station, looked admiringly at Teague. "For many years I dream of arresting Luis Zira. *Ole,* but it is not to be—until you, *amigo,* make one little phone call. And guess what else we caught."

"I pass," Teague said.

"Two gentlemen from overseas, *amigo!* They waited for Malon. Zira planned to take them and Malon to a fishing village in Baja, California. They planned to sail out into

the Pacific and, I think, meet a submarine. I guess their destination would be Vladivostok or a Red China port."

"I'm damned!" Teague breathed.

Moreles chuckled again. "Not at all! I listen to these two shout that they are citizens of the Peoples' Republic. But now I am sure their passports are bad. They will have a very hard time in jail until their Ambassador gets them released. Even then, I do not think they will be happy to go home, since they have failed so miserably."

Teague leaned forward. "Give with the story, *amigo*."

"Aye, that would be to ruin it. Why not have it from the culprits themselves? There is the station just ahead."

TEAGUE had the full story by that evening when he drove back across the border with Rita Ellis. He took her to the station and David Longcor was released while Teague called Mary and told her he was bringing visitors.

She was surprised when he introduced David Longcor and Rita Ellis. He grinned in answer to her questioning look. "You've heard so much about them, Doll, and took such an interest, I thought you ought to meet them."

Her eyes softened and her smile filled with understanding. She made them welcome, and then served coffee.

Suddenly Rita sobbed—a delayed, sudden reaction to all that had happened. Mary made a sympathetic sound and crossed the room to comfort her. Both women left, Mary taking her to the bedroom where they could talk. Teague lit a cigarette and looked uncomfortably at Longcor. He could still hear Webb's surprised approval at the new developments in the case. It had even shaken Ainslee into something faintly akin to excitement. It was good, all of it, soundly good this time. But still Teague felt that he must repay a debt to Longcor, the man who might have suffered most had Teague failed to probe deeper. He said as much to Longcor now.

"But it's still very strange," Longcor said.

"Not after we got the goons who were to take care of Rita," Teague answered. "They spilled the whole story about Malon. Two of Zira's men, Montoya and Garcia,

picked him up from an American syndicate in Tucson. Just outside the town here, they ran into a road block and lost their heads. They ran and when they had a second brush with the immigration boys, they decided Malon was just too damn hot. They slipped a knife in him. That put Zira's neck in a noose."

"Why?" Longcor asked.

"Zira had two Iron Curtain comrades on his back, and he had his boss in Mexico City to face. Malon's death knocked everything haywire, including enough pesos to make us both rich. Zira's boss doesn't like to lose money on botched jobs. If Zira could say he couldn't be blamed for the killing, then he'd get by without losing his own life, either to the comrades or his boss."

"So it was Rita."

"Rita," Teague nodded. "But first he had Montoya and Garcia taken up in the hills. A bullet in the brain is a mighty sure way to keep a man from talking. These boys we captured today were the ones who took care of that job. In the meantime, Zira took Rita for some drinks, doped 'em heavy so she was out for a long time."

"What a devil's scheme!" Longcor exclaimed.

"Zira had his own skin to save," Teague said. "So when the boys came back from their killing job, he had them take Rita home and put Malon's body in her apartment, fixing it to look as though they'd had quite a party, ending with Rita doing the knifing job."

Longcor stared at him, face tight. He shuddered.

"Then you grew noble," Teague continued in a moment, "and covered for her. Zira still had a fall guy, but he couldn't be sure how far you'd go. He let it ride until he decided that the best deal would be to get Rita out of the way. Then if you changed your story, she wouldn't be around to provide the proof. You'd have had it, the way Zira figured. Lucky for you, Mary thought this whole thing was just too easy. It worried me, too, so I took it from there. Sure enough, you hadn't covered all the angles and you can't lie worth a damn. So... here you are."

"Here I am," Longcor said.

"Zira is having a bad time right now," Teague said. "He can't be held for Malon's murder, since he did not use the

knife. But he will have enough to worry about for the killing of Montoya and Garcia, for hiding two secret agents and being tied up in the plot to slip Malon from the United States. Moreles has always wanted to get a good, tight hold on Zira. He has it now."

Rita and Longcor left early, and Teague drove them to Longcor's home. He cautioned Rita. "Moreles will need you as a witness when Zira comes to trial. I promised him you'd be there."

"I'll go," she said.

"Will it be soon?" Longcor asked. He smiled apologetically. "Rita and I might have some plans."

Teague chuckled. "Moreles moves fast. He won't hold you up. Goodnight."

MARY WAS already undressing when Teague returned. She spoke of Rita and Longcor and Teague told her, as he prepared for bed, what Webb and Ainslee had said about the case, how pleased Moreles was.

"They have a very good man to help them," Mary said with pride. She and Teague lay propped against the pillows having a final cigarette.

"Funny thing, Mary," Teague said; "I don't know if Longcor believed Rita's story or not. But he still loved her enough to cover any mistakes she might have made. I kept thinking of you and me, all the time. I—well, I kind of wondered."

"What?"

"I love you enough to want to do for you what he did for Rita. But he had guts." Teague sighed in wonder. "A vag, a *drifter,* a has-been when you look at him. But I wish there were more Longcors in this world. I could use a little of his courage myself."

Mary snapped out the light. She snuggled against him and her arm went about his chest, her fingers caressing his jaw. She kissed him.

"You have got it, Frank. You could have let his confession stand. They said what a smart policeman you were. But you didn't—yet you wanted to, very badly."

"Yeah," he said.

She kissed him again. "You couldn't have done a better job."

"All right, Doll. If you say so."

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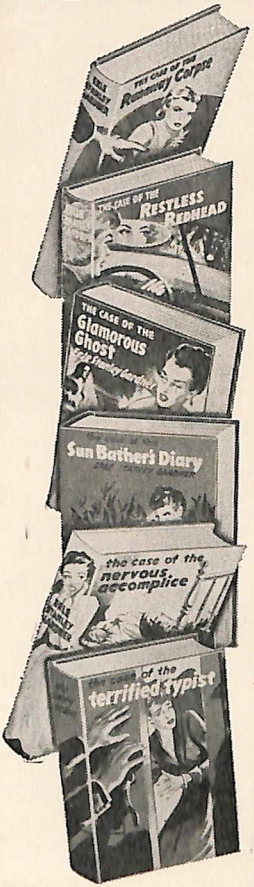
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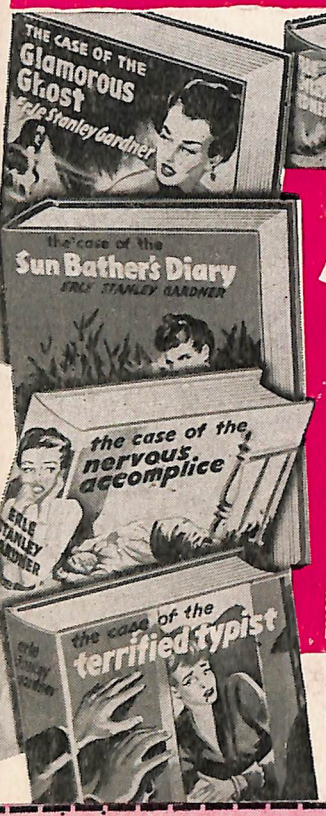
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The Very Latest Perry Mason Hit!

Perry Mason has an ace up his sleeve—a gorgeous red-head! She's the surprise witness he's counting on to save his client from the electric chair. But she DISAPPEARS. Perry can't locate her. But when the trial opens she's *in the courtroom.* SHE'S going to be the star witness FOR the D. A.!

2 The Case of The NERVOUS ACCOMPLICE

Mason's beautiful client, Sybil Harlan, is on trial for murder. The District Attorney produces one witness after another—right down to a ballistics expert who says that the fatal bullet came from Sybil's gun! And all Perry offers in her defense is—*a wheelbarrow filled with rusty scrap iron!*

3 The Case of The SUN BATHER'S DIARY

Perry gets a frantic phone call—from a woman who says all her clothes and her auto trailer were stolen while she was sunbathing. She offers Perry $1500 to recover them. The investigation leads Mason into a MURDER case. According to the evidence, the killer is either Perry's client . . . *or Perry himself!*

4 The Case of The GLAMOROUS GHOST

Perry's client has amnesia. She can't remember a thing that happened on the fateful night her husband was murdered. She can't even recognize her own gun — the MURDER WEAPON!

5 The Case of The RESTLESS REDHEAD

Perry Mason's client is the victim of a double frame-up . . . or IS she? The first time she called up Steve Merrill, the police came—and accused her of stealing $40,000 in jewels from Merrill's wife. The SECOND time she called him, the police came again. This time they accused her of MURDERING Merrill!

6 The Case of The RUNAWAY CORPSE

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter which accuses her of planning to poison her husband Ed. (Ed has just died of arsenic poisoning!) Perry searches Ed's office and finds an envelope with six sheets of *blank* paper! Then the police accuse Perry of substituting the blanks for the REAL letter!

Continued on Inside Cover

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